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# THE MERV OASIS

VOL. I.

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# THE MERV OASIS

TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES EAST OF THE CASPIAN

DURING THE YEARS 1879-80-81

INCLUDING

FIVE MONTHS' RESIDENCE AMONG THE TEKKÉS OF MERV

BY

EDMOND O'DONOVAN

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE 'DAILY NEWS'

With Portrait, Maps, and Facsimiles of State Documents

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1882

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TO

J. R. ROBINSON, ESQ.

*of the 'Daily News'*

WITHOUT WHOSE SUGGESTION THE TRAVELS NARRATED IN THESE VOLUMES WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN, AND BUT FOR WHOSE GENEROUS SUPPORT THEY WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO A SUCCESSFUL ISSUE

This Work is Dedicated

BY HIS OBLIGED FRIEND

*THE AUTHOR*

# PREFACE.

THESE pages contain a simple record of my wanderings around and beyond the Caspian, including a five months' residence at Merv, during the three years 1879–1881. I had at first purposed confining my narrative to Merv itself and its immediate surroundings; but my friends suggested that it would in such case be too circumscribed in scope, and not fully appreciable by those who had not previously paid considerable attention to Central Asian matters. Accordingly, I have related my experiences of the Russian settlements on the Eastern Caspian littoral, and touched very slightly upon the military operations directed against the Akhal Tekké tribes and their stronghold at Geok Tepé. I have also entered into the border relations existing between Russians, Turcomans, and Persians, in order that the subsequent description of the attitude of the Merv Turcomans might be the better understood. The main interest of the book, however, centres in that portion of it which relates to Merv itself; and in narrating what I

have to say about that place and its people, I have, as far as possible, sought to confine myself to what I actually saw and heard among them. All information contained in these volumes relative to the oasis and its population is derived directly from the fountain-head; and I have carefully abstained from quoting the recollections and opinions of other writers. Apart from pure narrative, the reader will occasionally meet with some expressions of opinion as to future political possibilities, and an appreciation of the present and coming military situation.

The Oriental documents added in the Appendix will serve as examples of the caligraphy and epistolary style of the country, and will at the same time show the nature of the aspirations and ideas of the chiefs, as well as the estimation in which I was myself held when I quitted their territory. The general map is based upon that published, in connection with the report of his travels in North-Eastern Khorassan, by Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. Stewart. On this I have grafted my own corrections, and my surveys of the territory lying eastward of the point at which his travels in the Attok ceased, viz. near Abiverd. The plan of the Merv oasis and its water system is purely original, and, as far as I am aware, the first ever based on an actual survey. Of the plan showing the old cities and their relative positions the same is to be said.

I have on every possible occasion introduced illustrative anecdote and personal adventure, not only to lighten the general narrative, but also as the best possible method of conveying to my readers the nature of the surroundings amidst which I was placed, and the character of the people with whom I had to deal; but the space allotted to me for the description of three years' experiences scarcely allows me the latitude I could have desired in this regard. Still, as a record of the almost unique circumstances in which I was placed, I trust that the following pages will meet with the indulgence, if not with the approval, of the reading public.

E. O'D.

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### FROM TREBIZOND TO THE CASPIAN.

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I LEFT Trebizond at sunset on Wednesday, February 5, 1879, *en route* for Central Asia. It was my intention to travel to Central Thibet, but subsequent circumstances obliged me to alter my resolution, and directed my steps to a locality perhaps not less interesting. I started by the English steamer 'Principe di Carignano,' reaching Batoum early on the morning of the 6th. I found that place wonderfully increased in size, even during the short time which had elapsed since the Russian occupation. The number of houses had almost trebled, and, after the

fashion of Russia generally, the majority of these consisted of rum and *vodka*[1] shops. At least one barrel-organ was to be heard grinding in the streets, and, for the first time in the history of the town, public vehicles—the Russian *phäeton*, or gig—plied for hire. The same afternoon, the 'Principe di Carignano' continued her voyage, arriving at the mouth of the Rion river in two and a half hours. Here one became fully impressed with the necessity felt by Russia for a better naval station than Poti on the Southern Black Sea littoral. The extreme shallowness of the water obliged us to anchor at least a mile and a half from the low pebbly beach, and, owing to the violent off-shore wind which prevailed, which would neither allow us to send boats ashore, nor the usual tug steamer, employed for disembarking passengers, to come off, two days and a half elapsed before the slightest chance of landing occurred. Such delays, I was told, were of common occurrence. At length some of the fishing luggers ventured to put out from the river's mouth, and brought us and our baggage ashore.

Arrived within the mouth of the river, we were taken in tow by a small steamer, which tugged us a distance of two miles, finally landing us at the town of Poti itself. The river banks on either side presented a dismal aspect, such as one notices along the minor tributaries of the Mississippi. Everything seemed but lately to have been inundated. Rotting 'snags' stuck from the slimy surface of the semi-stagnant water; the lower portion of those trees which stood along the margin looked black and rotting, and a general odour of decomposing vegetable matter permeated the air. Poti is notorious for its unhealthy, feverish climate, and, considering its immediate surroundings, I am not surprised at this. As a naval station there can be no comparison between it

[1] A fiery, white spirituous liquor, largely consumed in Russia.

and Batoum. The latter possesses a deep and well-sheltered, though small harbour, where the largest vessels can anchor within a few fathoms of the beach, and where they are perfectly sheltered from winds, whether off or on shore. It is true that under Turkish rule, owing to the blocking of the mouths of several minor mountain streams, swamps had formed in the neighbourhood of the town, which rendered it to a certain extent a feverish locality. Still, the smallest engineering effort would serve to remove this drawback, and I believe that at this moment such effort is being made. Among my fellow-travellers who crowded the luggers were Trans-Caspian Turcomans, on whom I now laid my eyes for the first time. They were pilgrims returning from Mecca; for, notwithstanding the never-ceasing hostility between the nomads and the Russians, the former invariably adopt the route by Baku, Tiflis, Poti, and Constantinople, when going to the Sacred City, instead of the land route by Persia and Baghdad. Before we were permitted to leave the precincts of the landing station, the usual tedious examination of baggage, and then of passports, had to be undergone, and fully four hours elapsed after our landing before we were allowed to enter the town. About Poti itself there is little to say. It is a rambling kind of place, largely composed of wooden shanties, and, but for its *phäetons*, low-crowned-hatted coachmen, and its unmistakeable gendarmes, might pass for a town of almost any nationality. From Poti there is a railroad to Tiflis, the journey to the latter place occupying about twelve hours by ordinary train. During the first two hours, the country one traverses is indescribably dreary, rotting forest growth and stagnant overflows of the river being its main characteristics. Then a steep gradient is arrived at, by which the train mounts to the crest of an outlying spur of the

Caucasus, whence a commanding view is obtained over the vast expanse of country lying in the direction of Tiflis. Leaving Poti late in the afternoon, one arrives at the capital of the Trans-Caucasus early on the following morning. The first thing that strikes the eye is the semi-Asiatic, semi-European aspect of the place—the old town, with its narrow streets, its old-fashioned booths, and artisans plying their trades in full view of the public, together with Tartar head-dresses and fur-lined coats, contrasting violently with the palatial houses, wide *prospects*, and great open gardens, thronged with persons of both sexes, wearing the *ne plus ultra* of Western European fashionable attire. I was unfortunate enough to miss seeing Prince Mirski, the governor of the town, he being absent in the interior; so, after a couple of days' delay at the Hotel Cavcass, I prepared for my journey across the steppes which separated me from the Western Caspian border. During the two nights which I remained in Tiflis, I had ample opportunity of witnessing the remarkably 'fast' rate of living which usually obtains in better-class Russian society. Everything seemed at fever-heat. Theatres, music-halls, and circuses were nightly thronged, and *petits soupers* and select dinner parties seemed the order of the day. As for myself, the thing I least liked about Tiflis was the very excessive charge made at the hotel, and I was glad when the morning for my departure arrived.

We are told that up to the end of the seventeenth century in France, a traveller setting out from Lyons for Paris, in view of the state of the road, considered it his duty to draw up his last will and testament. If the roads in France at that date bore any resemblance to those I have traversed on my way from Tiflis across the Trans-Caucasian plain, I must say the travellers were perfectly

justified in their precautions. I had heard and read a good deal about travel in this part of the world, but my wildest anticipations fell very far short of the sad reality.

When one has to do with officials in Russia, especially those of a subordinate class, he is certain to be worried almost out of his existence by needless and seemingly endless delays before the simplest matter of business can be effected, or the inevitable official documents procured. After a good deal of trouble I succeeded in securing the all-important *padarosjna* (this is the nearest approach I can make to the name in our alphabet), which entitles the holder to carriages and post-horses. It is a large sheet of paper bearing the Russian double-headed eagle, with paraphernalia, in the water-mark, and having several double-headed eagles and ornamental panels all over it. It bears many numbers of registration, and a still greater amount of signatures and counter-signatures, and is not unlike a magnified reproduction of some of the earlier American paper dollars. On the strength of this document, the people of the Hotel Cavcass undertook to find me an orthodox postal vehicle, with the due number of horses and the official conductor. The vehicle in which one ordinarily travels by post in this part of the world is termed a *troïka*. There is a more luxurious kind of conveyance—which, to tell the truth, is not saying much for it—named a *tarentasse*; but though one may pay the increased rate demanded for such a carriage, he is not always sure of finding others at the changing-places on the route, should, as is generally the case, his own come to grief. The experienced traveller generally chooses the *troïka*, for at each station at least half a dozen are always in readiness to supply the almost inevitable break-downs which occur from post-house to post-house. At the moment of which I speak I had never seen

either *tarentasse* or *troïka*. I had a kind of preconceived idea about four fiery steeds and a fur-lined carriage, in which the traveller is whirled in luxury to his destination. Judge of my surprise when, on a raw winter's morning, just as the grey dawn was stealing over the turrets of the old Persian fortress, I saw a nameless kind of thing drawn up before the door of the hotel. Though I had just been summoned from bed to take my place, I had not the slightest suspicion that the four-wheeled horror before me was even intended for my luggage, so I waited patiently for the arrival of my ideal conveyance. The hall porter and some chilly-looking waiters were standing around, impatiently awaiting a 'gratification,' and evidently believing that I was all the time buried in deep political or scientific thought. I was beginning to get stiff with cold, and at length I asked, 'Where is this coach?' 'Your Excellence,' said the porter, 'it is there before you.' When I shall have described a *troïka*, no one will wonder at the exclamation of amazement and terror which burst from my lips at the bare idea that I had to travel four hundred miles in such a thing. Imagine a pig-trough of the roughest possible construction, four feet and a half long, two and a half wide at the top, and one at the bottom, filled with coarse hay, more than half thistles, and set upon four poles, which in turn rest upon the axles of two pairs of wheels. Besides these poles, springs, even of the most rudimentary kind, there are none. Seen from the outside, the *troïka* has the appearance of a primitive lake-habitation canoe, just drawn out of a mud bank; anything in the shape of washing, either for vehicles or drivers, being considered in this part of the world entirely a work of supererogation.

The driver, clad in a rough sheep-skin tunic, fitting closely at the waist, the woolly side turned inwards, and

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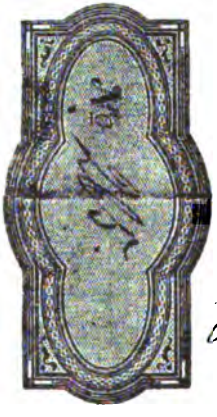
# АЛЕК



*Отъ* Города

Тарнополю

Кули Мел

*давать по* Ф

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Пр. Тарнопольскаго Судебнаго

wearing a prodigious conical cap of the same material, sits upon the forward edge of the vehicle. With a combination of patched leather straps and knotted ropes by way of reins, he conducts the three horses. The centre animal is between the two shafts, which are joined by a high wooden arch of a parabolic form. From the summit of this arch a leather strap, passing under the animal's chin, keeps his head high, while two pretty large bells, hung just where he ought to keep his ears, force him to carry the latter in a painfully constrained position, while during the whole of the stage he must be almost deafened by the clang. The horses on either side are very loosely harnessed; so much so, that while the central one is, with the vehicle, running along a deep narrow cutting, the flankers are on the top of high banks on either side, or *vice versâ*. Once for all, I give a description of a *troïka* as the species of carriage in which I made my journey to the Caspian. As the stations at which relays are usually found are but twenty-seven or twenty-eight miles apart, they are gone over, almost the whole time, at full gallop. In such guise, mingled with heterogeneous portions of luggage, and wallowing in thorny hay, I was whirled out of Tiflis, across a long wooden bridge over the Kur, and then up a long, zig-zag, dusty, stony road, leading to the plateau east of the town. Arrived on the plateau, a sudden undulation of the road shuts out the last glimpse of the city. Henceforth, for many a weary league, all is bleak. There are sandy rolling expanses where the glaring gravelly surface is varied only by scant olive-green patches and clouds of dun-red dust. On the right are a couple of sad-looking *turbés*, or Mahometan tombs—dreary square structures of earth-coloured, unbaked brick, surmounted by broken cupolas, amidst whose crumbling walls nomadic goat-herds cower around a scanty fire. A

compound flock of small, active sheep, mingled with wiry, long-haired goats, with an occasional diminutive donkey, the whole conducted by a scriptural-looking person with primitive shepherd's crook, crosses the way. Then comes a string of shaggy, supercilious-aired camels, each bearing a couple of slimy casks of petroleum from Baku, every member of the string growling and groaning in true camel fashion. Now and then a blue cloud starts up from the gravelly track. It is composed of wild pigeons. What they can possibly find to attract them to that dusty gully it is not easy to understand. Yet they look plump and strong, notwithstanding the apparent unproductiveness of the surroundings. Meanwhile the driver, with many an Asiatic whoop and shout, plies his long whip, and we tear along, one side of the *troïka* occasionally a couple of feet higher than the other, scaring dozens of white-backed scald-crows from something they, like the pigeons, find in the dust. They fly on a hundred yards, and then, with a curious obstinacy, settle again and again before us, to be driven on again. Away to the left the giant range of the Caucasus trembles in ghastly whiteness athwart the cloudless sky, and at its base stretches widely a blue mirage that mocks the Kur, alongside of which we go. To the right, farther off still, fainter and more visionary than the Caucasus, are the Persian mountains. Between, a vast dun expanse, fifty or sixty miles across, the horizon ahead, clear and uninterrupted as that of mid-ocean. It is not surprising that Eastern imagination has conjured up so many Gins and Ghouls to haunt its day-dreams. Out on these plains one feels more lonely and abandoned at mid-day, than in the grizzliest, most uncanny churchyard at home at the witching hour of night. It was with a real sense of relief that I at length perceived, slightly on my side of the horizon, a cloud of smoke. My

conductor informed me that in a couple of hours after reaching this smoke we should arrive at the first station.

A station on this route is not like a railway station. The latter exists because of certain pre-existent surroundings; in the former case the surroundings exist because of the station. In other words, out on these steppe-like expanses, certain stages are measured off along a given line, and the people employed there have created what there is of cultivation, and attracted the small population which clusters round the post-house, which, except in the case of villages few and far between, consists simply of rude farm buildings. The station, which I found behind the horizon, comprised three small buildings of a single story, some barns, and a few enclosures for fowl and cattle. The station-master, with his military uniform and flat regulation cap, was the only sign of officialism about the place. As a rule, I found these station-masters exceedingly obliging, and ready to afford the traveller every assistance. At each station-house is a 'guest-chamber,' as the Mohammedans style the apartment in their houses which is appropriated to the reception of strangers. It is generally a small room containing two wooden camp-beds, a table, a fire-place, and sometimes a couple of chairs. No bedding is provided, the traveller being supposed to bring this with him, as well as his food, tea, sugar, &c. A petroleum lamp burns all night within the chamber, and another is attached to the blue and white striped post at the door, which indicates the station, with its distance from the last centre of Government, in versts. Usually it is difficult to procure food, unless some of the women of the establishment can supply a few eggs and some sheets of the peculiar leathery bread, rivalling in size and consistency a cobbler's apron, which seems to pervade the entire East. The only thing the traveller can

be certain of finding is the redoubtable *samovar*. This instrument is to be found in the humblest Tartar hovel, for tea—morning, noon, and night—seems an absolutely indispensable necessity of Russian populations. This *samovar* is a large cylindrical brass urn, mounted on a short column and broad pedestal, having a movable cover, from the centre of which projects a vertical chimney, six inches high. This chimney connects with a central tubular furnace, which is filled with lighted charcoal. The water occupies the annular space outside, and is drawn off by means of a stopcock. The chimney is bell-mouthed, and supports a small metal or porcelain tea-pot, which contains what we should consider pretty strong tea, kept at almost boiling-point by the heat of the chimney. It is an almost universal custom here to drink tea in glass tumblers. Each glass is filled one-third, or in some cases one-half, with the liquid contained in the small tea-pot, and the remainder with boiling water from the *samovar*. Some persons dissolve their sugar in the tea, but many prefer to hold it between their lips and suck the tea through it. Milk or cream as an adjunct is a thing unheard of, though sometimes rum or cognac is added. On the arrival of a *troïka* with travellers, the *samovar* is immediately brought into the guest-room, and tea is prepared while the horses are being changed. This description will answer for the vast majority of postal stations on the Caspian route. Weak tea swallowed, the traveller again mounts his chariot, which at once dashes away in the most reckless fashion, utterly regardless of the nature or state of the road. Over bad portions the jolting of the springless vehicle is terrific, especially as, after the first ten minutes, one finds his way through the hay to the boards beneath. During the first hours of the journey from Tiflis, one forgets the physical inconveniences of the

system of travelling, wrapt in admiration of the wonderful mountain and plain scenes; but the eternal sameness at length, notwithstanding its magnificence, palls upon the eye; and the traveller falls into a dreamy state, which is broken only by some marvellous jump of the *troïka* over an irrigation trench three feet deep, drawn across the road. The postal conveyances do not always follow the great high road. The drivers make all kinds of short cuts, choosing their way very much as a rider after the hounds would.[1] After the first two stations from Tiflis, I can only compare our mode of progress to a headlong steeplechase over a violently accidented ploughed field, with continually occurring mad dashes across steep-sided torrent beds filled with large boulders—the banks on either side having a slope of thirty or forty degrees, sometimes more. The great high road is, as a rule, very good except in low-lying parts, where it is apt to be inundated at times. But the drivers of the post *troïkas* laugh conventionalities to scorn, and would not go a quarter of a mile out of their way to follow the best road on earth; and their pace over hill and dale is the same as on the highway. Under ordinary circumstances the jolting is bad enough, but 'across country' must be left to the imagination. I remember once going into action seated on the tumbril of a field-gun, galloping over a rough, stony plain. It was luxurious ease compared to the sensations experienced in a *troïka* when the driver takes it into his head to make a short cut.

At the third station from Tiflis the traveller may be said to bid farewell for the time being to civilisation. It is a kind of village on the right bank of the Kur. The

[1] Since these lines were written, the Trans-Caucasus railroad has been commenced and nearly completed; so that the experiences related above are, for the traveller to Baku, things of the past.

postal station and the houses of three or four well-to-do Tartar families were the only buildings, strictly speaking, above the surface of the ground. The other dozen or so of habitations are even more troglodytic than those of Central Armenia. In the latter place there is, at least, something like a slightly raised tumulus to suggest to the experienced eye that a dwelling exists, or did so formerly. Here advantage is taken of some scarped bank, into which a broad deep trench is cut. This is covered over with hurdles and branches, and the earth which covers all is scarcely, if at all, above the level of the surrounding surface. Here and there a wooden cask-like construction acts as chimney; but in most instances this last is simply a hole in the ground, with stone coping, and a small wooden fence erected round it to prevent human beings or cattle from falling through. Buffaloes and goats wander at will over these singular house-tops. A stranger is often startled, while strolling over what he considers solid ground, to come upon an oblong opening, through which he can hear human voices. This is one of the ventilation holes which abound; and I wonder that they are not a more frequent source of accident than they seem to be. Huge wolf-like dogs prowl about, causing the stranger to pass them by a kind of sidelong, edging movement, by way of precaution. Here and there are large rectangular enclosures seventy or eighty feet square, girt by walls of stout hurdle, within which are the farm sheds and habitations of the better class of the population. The hurdle wall is meant as a protection to the flocks at night, against the depredations of wolves and wild cats. These latter are really formidable creatures—little less in size than a leopard, of a lion-tawny coloured stiff fur, with flat heads and noses, half-way between those of an otter and a bull-dog. One had just been shot by a peasant close to the

station. It was one of the ugliest-looking beasts I had ever seen. For twenty miles round, the country is infested by all manner of wild animals. The village or station is situated on a sloping bank, one side of which descends vertically to the Kur, often going sheer down two hundred feet to the water's edge. The river, spread out into a network of channels and swamps, studded with marshy islands overgrown with brushwood and lesser forest trees, is nearly a mile wide. Close by are patches of primæval forest, the haunts of wild boars, lynxes, and all the other savage animals of the locality. Wild boars' flesh is the only meat one can reckon on, but that, with occasional wild ducks and partridges, is in abundance.

Owing to the marshy ground, the neighbourhood is very unhealthy, ague largely prevailing. I myself suffered from the renewal in the locality of an old complaint. Hot and cold sweats, trembling, and violent accesses of vomiting are the symptoms. At one time I feared that I had caught the much-dreaded Astrakan plague, but I recovered after a couple of days and a good deal of quinine. A still worse mishap, however, occurred at this station. I had a small leather writing-case, closed by a lock, and containing all my maps, notes, and writing material. There are always prowling round a large station a number of thievish Tartars, and while seeing to the transfer of my baggage to the place where I was to pass the night, one of these itinerant gentlemen, evidently mistaking the article for a money-box, made off with it. On missing it I at once called on the officer of the station to despatch men to pursue the thief. Everything possible was done, but in vain, and in the interim my sword-belt disappeared. The station officers had warned me against these gentry, but I could not imagine that they would carry on their depredations at the very door of the post-house.

It would be tedious to recapitulate the scenes of each day's journey ; one day was like another, save that at each mile the road grew worse. At last it seemed to have totally disappeared. We promenaded at will over long brown expanses, and over water-worn torrent-beds, the driver seeming always to have the most implicit faith in the impossibility of upsetting his vehicle. Sometimes long trains of camels glided by us in spectral fashion, the huge loads of lengthy osiers with which some of them were laden, the branches trailing behind on the ground, giving them the air of gigantic long-legged porcupines. Then we would meet a Tartar cavalcade, with indigenous ladies on horseback, clothed as usual in staring red garments, and much more effectually veiled than the Turkish ladies generally are. From time to time trains of twenty or thirty hugé waggons, each drawn by four or five horses all abreast, came by from Persia. The trade from the latter country on this side is evidently far greater than that by the Bayazid and Erzeroum routes.

On, on, across burnt-up, grey-looking expanses, the Caucasus and Persian mountains always looming right and left, amid the glare of an Eastern day. Elizabethpol, the next station, is a kind of half-way house between the last traces of Europe and the Caspian shores. It is approached by a steep road descending towards the western bank of the Kur. You cross a water-worn, boulder-strewn channel, descending at an angle of 45°. You are dragged through the water before you have time to appreciate the fact that your feet are flooded in the vehicle, and up an equally abrupt slope along the border of ancient fortifications taken by Shah Abass from the Turks 250 years ago; and then, plunging among the brick-fields and ruined mud-walls, all white in the glaring sun, you suddenly make your appearance in the modern

town of Elizabethpol. On the right are gardens, with stately trees, centennial elms, and *chenars*; there are never-ending suburbs, as there usually are to Oriental towns, as nobody seems to wish to occupy a site on which a predecessor has lived.

Half a verst is got over, and we are in the midst of the town of Elizabethpol. Like Tiflis, it is half Asiatic, half European. There are Tartar shops in the bazaar, there are Tartar minarets on the mosques, there are kalpaked Tartars in the streets; the latter contrasting with the patrols of from thirty to forty soldiers, with long grey coats and fixed bayonets, marching slowly along the public ways. There are Turkish *cafés*—holes in the wall, as we should probably call them—mere niches, within which the proprietor crouches, nursing his charcoal fire wherewith to light water-pipes for his customers. Those who speak of 'more than Eastern splendour' should go to Elizabethpol to have their ideas corrected. I do not know how it is that the East is always connected with splendour in European minds, but I venture to think that in the mind of anyone who has practically visited the East the idea will be reversed, and, even in traversing the Trans-Caucasus, the ground over which one goes will show even a more violent contrast between Eastern and Western civilisation than can be noticed in crossing the Bosphorus itself.

My battered conveyance drew up at the door of what I should be tempted to call a caravanserai, but which, in view of the fact of its being in Russia, I suppose I must style an hotel. Mud-spattered and weary, I descended from my nest of straw in the *troïka* which had carried me so far, and, limping under a horse-shoe archway, found myself in a spacious courtyard, surrounded by two tiers of galleries. I was in the Grand Hotel of Elizabethpol. It was some time before I could attract the attention of any

of the *employés*, but after a while I was shown into what they were pleased to call my bedroom. Its furniture consisted of a bedstead, guiltless of mattress or anything else which we are accustomed to associate with the name of bed. I was wearied to death, and could scarcely summon energy to cry aloud for the attendants, for bell there was not. After some parley I understood that it was the custom for travellers in these parts to bring beds with them, and that hotel-keepers were not expected to pander to the luxury of ordinary people like myself. However, by dint of bribery, I secured a kind of feather-bed, and prepared to make up by a night's sound repose for the fatigues endured since leaving Tiflis. I thought that a wash would be the best preliminary to this; but no such thing as a basin-stand seemed to exist. I summoned the attendant, and learned that *the* basin was still in use. From this I gathered that in the Grand Hotel of Elizabethpol only one basin was allowed for the service of the guests. A very solid-looking individual finally made his appearance with a basin full of water which had already been used, the contents of which he flung over the balcony into the centre of the yard. In this yard was already a stagnant pool, which stank horribly; and I may add, *en parenthèse*, that more than wash-basins were emptied into it over the balcony.

There was an attempt at a *table-d'hôte*, and a very poor one it was. The bill of fare was apparently drawn up rather for the amusement of the guests than with the view of pointing out to them in what guise they should satisfy their appetites. After having enumerated in vain several articles the names of which were written very plainly upon the *carte*, I was forced at length to say, 'What *have* you got?' Then I discovered that there were ham and caviare, the two never-failing articles of diet to be met with in the most out-of-the-way Russian

town. Perhaps most of my readers are unacquainted with this Russian luxury—I mean caviare. It is the roe of the sturgeon. When the fish is freshly caught, and its roe (caviare) consumed, I am told that it is a delicacy such as the world elsewhere cannot produce. The black, salted specimens which reach Europe are, it is said, nothing in comparison with the caviare as Russians eat it at home. For my part, if the caviare as Russians eat it have any resemblance whatever to the black salted caviare familiar to us, 'I'll none of it.' I once, by accident, tasted it at Constantinople, and it seemed to me that, inadvertently, a spoonful of cod-liver oil had been administered to me. It would be tedious to enumerate the disadvantages of hotels under such circumstances. They can be better imagined than described.

According to Russian courtesy, when a traveller of any distinction passes through a district, he is supposed to call upon and pay his respects to the local governor. Accordingly, I donned the best suit which the slender wardrobe carried in my saddle-bags afforded me, and presented myself at the palace of the Government, where Prince Chavchavaza resided. I was graciously received, but the Prince, a Georgian of the old school, unfortunately did not understand French. The secretary, more than polite, as secretaries usually are in Russia, interpreted our discourse. I was received in a chamber hung with ancient tapestry, the walls of which were garnished with arms of different periods, captured during the protracted struggle in which Schamyl led the Caucasians. Our conversation at first took a general turn, and after a while we began to speak of the future of the Russian Empire over these vast plains. I observed that nothing but means of communication and transport were wanting to make Russia the Rome of to-day. He bowed his head in

assent, and gave me many examples, which space does not allow me to recapitulate here, especially as the present is only a chapter introductory to my adventures beyond the Caspian. And then, suddenly turning to me, he fixed his dark eyes upon my face with a piercing glance, and said, 'Do you know that we expect an army corps shortly, bound for the shores of the Caspian?' 'My prince,' I replied, 'I was unaware of the fact. Where are they going to?' 'There is an expedition against the Turcomans,' he said, 'commanded by General Lazareff.' This was news for me, and I resolved, instead of proceeding on my original mission, to follow the operations of the Russian columns. Having thus determined, nothing was left but to await the arrival of the Commander-in-Chief, General Lazareff, and to ask his permission to accompany his expedition. I waited several days, amid the usual spendthrift extravagance of Russian border towns, and at length the colossal old general made his appearance. General Lazareff was no ordinary man. In stature he was over six feet high, and broadly made in proportion. A mass of jaw was surmounted by a more than Cæsarian nose, and the large grey eye, half hidden by the heavy eyelid, denoted the amount of observation which as a specialty belongs to his race, the Armenian. Up to the age of twenty years he worked as a journeyman tailor in the town of Baku, upon the Caspian edge. Later on, he was a sergeant in the twenty-first regiment of the line; and when years had gone by, it was Lazareff who captured Schamyl in his stronghold amid the Caucasus. Relegated to obscurity by political intrigues, he remained, living upon his modest allowance, until the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war called him again into action. He sent forward a petition to the Emperor, asking to be employed in the humblest capacity, and was immediately sent to the

front before Kars in the capacity of Lieutenant-General. He took an active part in the siege of that place, and it was owing to his exertions, to his intrigues, and to his intrepidity, that Kars became a Russian citadel instead of a Turkish one.

Two days elapsed before I was able to leave Elizabethpol. At half-past six in the morning I started in the postal *troïka*. To describe the scenes and incidents along the route would be but to repeat what I have already written, for each section of the road is, physically, precisely like the other, so is each post-house, so are the officials, and the occurrences of each day and hour. There are the same undulating plains, with the Kur on the right, and Persian mountains to the left; the same clouds of blue pigeons and crows, the same dust, the same groaning camels. As the road descends towards the Kur, trees begin to appear, and there are occasional large expanses of jungle, which, to judge from the frequent appearance of animals of all descriptions, must be a happy hunting-ground for those who are addicted to field sports. Occasionally, too, one meets with a lonely farmhouse, or two or three buildings grouped together. These are for the most part inhabited by German colonists, and partially also by Fins. Around these dwellings are large vineyards. Wine is usually to be had in abundance, but it is of poor quality; nor do I ever recollect discovering *in situ* any of the wine which, under the name of *kakatinski*, is purchasable at all the hotels throughout the Trans-Caucasus. From time to time, also, one meets with the semi-subterranean Armenian villages to which I have already alluded. On the whole, the population is exceedingly sparse, and, considering the excellence of the soil, and the abundance of water, the country may be said to be almost uninhabited. There are great tracts of giant bulrushes and rotting jungle through which the driver continues his

way with the same mad pace as ever, making rushes at all the dangerous points, such as bridges more or less at right angles to the road, and innocent of such a thing as a parapet. Sometimes, to avoid the deep sloughs along the regular postal track, the *troïka* is driven along the side of a hill so steeply sloping as to induce strong fears of a momentary upsetting. Over and over again I preferred to dismount from my rough chariot and pick my way through the miry loam sooner than run the risk of broken bones at this, the commencement of my journey. Soon the banks of the Kur are reached—a deep, broad river, hemmed in on either side by domelike masses of brown magnesian limestone, running into each other. In many places the soil is covered with a white saline incrustation, in appearance exactly resembling a new snow fall. From hence to the Caspian shores and beyond them the earth is impregnated with this saline matter, which, mingling with the water of the streams and wells, renders it all but undrinkable. At the crossing point is the straggling village of Mingatsur. No such thing as a bridge exists, and the stream is far too deep, even when the water is scantiest during the dry season, to allow of an attempt to ford. It is here some hundred yards wide, and is traversed by means of a raft propelled backwards and forwards by the force of the current itself. A very thick cable, supported on either bank by a tall, stout framework, is drawn as tautly as possible across the stream. This passes between two rollers on board the raft, which, accordingly as the traject is to be made in one direction or the other, is set with its side obliquely to the current, which thus drives it along the rope to the opposite side. This raft is capable of transporting a couple of large waggons and a half dozen camels simultaneously. Along the river marge, owing to frequent

inundation, the ground is rich in the extreme, on account of alluvial deposits; but as, going eastward, we leave the river behind us, bleakness again comes on, and these same eternal expanses of plain, covered with short, burnt-up herbage, reach away right and left to the Caucasus and the Persian frontier. Here and there is to be seen a solitary camel, abandoned by some passing caravan, his depleted hump hanging over like an empty sack, and indicating an entire state of exhaustion.

Towards sunset, as we drew near the fourth station from Elizabethpol, and about 79¾ versts from that town, I had an opportunity of witnessing a Tartar funeral procession. First came a body of horsemen, armed to the teeth, and some twenty or thirty in number. Then a single horseman, bearing in front of him, across his saddle bow, the body, sewn up in a litter of Persian carpet, similar to that used in removing the wounded from the field of battle. The side poles had been brought together above the body, and fastened with rope. Then followed a long cavalcade composed of the friends of the deceased, moving at a very stately and funereal pace. There is a peculiarity in Tartar tombstones which now first came under my notice. They are quite unlike the turban stone of the Osmanli Turks, or the flat-lying slabs one sees among the Shiia Persians in the great burying-grounds in and around the sacred city of Meshed. The Tartar headstones are about eighteen inches high, and represent lance-heads sculptured in stone, or I might more aptly compare them to gigantic decanter stoppers. After this station the mud was so deep, and our progress so slow—the wheels sinking frequently axle deep into the stiff brown mud—that I took horse and rode some twenty versts. As none but Circassian horse-trappings were available, the stirrup leather being little over eighteen

inches long, I suffered frightfully from the cramped position which I was obliged to adopt. At this point the plain is traversed by an elevated mountain chain, along whose sides the road proceeded in the most tiresome zigzag manner, to enable the huge waggons plying between Baku and Tiflis, with their four or six horses abreast, to traverse the steep incline. My conductor would not follow this road, but went boldly up the side, from angle to angle, of the zigzag thoroughfare. Soon we got into the region of clouds, where all around us was a rolling waste of mist. Here and there, when wind gusts broke the wall of vapour, we caught below us occasional glimpses of the vast plain traversed by the Kur and its numerous tributaries. In ordinary weather, when the roads are in a tolerably good condition, by travelling hard one is supposed to arrive at Baku in twenty-four hours from the westward foot of this mountain; but the weather was so severe, the snow lay so deep, and the roads were in such exquisitely bad condition that we were unable to cover more than a third of the way within that time. There was a lonely station where the postmaster understood nothing but Persian. It was exceedingly cold, and I passed a wretched night sleeping upon one of the bare wooden camp beds with which the guest-rooms of the post-houses are supplied. I bought some red-legged partridges for a penny each, but found them so tough that I was glad to abandon them to a hungry-looking cat who glanced at me from the corner. Next morning I started on horseback for the town of Shumakha. We were five hours in traversing the most dreadful mountain tracks, often along the top of some great landslip which the torrent at its base had sapped from the mountain side. The country seemed alive with field mice, rats, and ferrets. Never do I recollect seeing so many of these

animals together. Great flocks of wild geese marched waddlingly on either side, and scarcely took the trouble to make way before our horses. Falcons and kites, too, were to be seen in incredible numbers, doubtless owing to the abundance of provision which they found at hand. Leaving the mountain, with its snow and fog, behind us, it was an inexpressible relief to issue upon the dry, warm plain stretching eastward to Shumakha. This place has the appearance of having been once a flourishing town, but owing to a violent earthquake which took place here some years back there is scarcely an edifice which is not in a ruinous condition. There are two large-sized mosques, one belonging to the Shiia Mussulmans, the other to the Sunnites of the town, for the population of Shumakha is almost exclusively Mussulman. The few Christians that there are, live in a quarter by themselves. The church tower, crowned with its green kiosk, rises in strong contrast with the crimson dome and minarets immediately in front. Considerable as the town is, at the postal station neither horses nor *troïkas* were to be found for the moment, and I was obliged to spend another night upon the rude benches of the guest-chamber, starting again early on the morning of Wednesday, the 27th, and passing another exceedingly disagreeable and difficult series of mountains deeply covered with snow.

Passing through Maraza, the station of Xorezsafen, thirty-one versts from Baku, is reached. Here the postal station consists of an antique castellated structure, in the old Moorish style, coeval with the days of Tartar independence, and known as Sheik Abass' house. At the next station, some sixteen versts farther on, my patience was sorely tried. The station itself consisted of a series of extensive farm-buildings, and there seemed no lack of *troïkas* and horses standing about in the muddy places

which represented stable-yards. A wedding was in progress, and the driver whose turn it was to conduct the vehicles could on no condition be induced to turn his back to the good cheer and *vodka* of the festivities. After a prolonged and wearisome debate among the company it was finally agreed to send a driver, but I had scarcely made two or three versts across a most disagreeably rocky ground when I perceived that my conductor had not the slightest intention of pushing on to Baku, and was trying every possible *ruse* in order to make out that it was impossible to reach my destination that evening. It was far better, he said, to turn back and partake of the good things which were being distributed at the marriage feast, and to pass the night in comfort, instead of pushing across the uncomfortable ground which lay between us and Baku. There were, he said, deep rivers to be crossed, and brigands were notoriously numerous along their banks. Finding me inexorable, he first upset one of the horses, and then managed to smash his harness. After a long halt in the cold, and bitterly cold it was, a combination of knotty straps and rotten ropes was rigged up, and we went forward, at as slow a pace as it was possible for a *troïka* to move at without standing still altogether. The horses had, apparently, as great an objection to go forward as the driver, and wandered incontinently all over the ground in any direction but that required of them. At length the fellow declared that with these horses it was impossible to go on, and I was obliged to sit waiting for two hours while he returned to the last station for others. It was seven o'clock in the morning when, after a weary night drive, we came in sight of Baku, lying some ten versts off; the Caspian, glittering beyond, being seen at intervals between the low hills that flanked its border. The country at this point is inex-

pressibly dreary and volcanic-looking; the salt incrustations which I have already mentioned are thicker and more extensive than ever. Here and there were straggling Tartar villages, with their flat houses and preposterously large conical chimneys, looking like gigantic mushrooms. From time to time we passed along the road the peculiar-looking carts characteristic of the country. The wheels were not less than eight feet in diameter, and very close to each other, the body of the cart being but two feet wide, a structure like a pulpit rising in front, gaudily painted, and probably intended for the use of the conductor. The centre of gravity of the vehicle was pitched so high, the wheels were so tall, and by their proximity afforded such a slender base, that it was a matter of wonder that at each jolt over the stony ground the entire contrivance did not turn over. It bore no bad resemblance to a great grass-spider with his long legs. Small cows, too, were to be met, with burdens strapped upon their backs, as one sees them among the nomad Kurds of Persia; and at length, driving at breakneck pace down the steeply-winding road, the *troïka* jostling and reeling over the rocky surface streaked with the wheel-marks of ages, we dashed into the outskirts of Baku. Away on the left, crowning the heights, and scattered in apparently unlimited numbers over the country northwards, were to be seen strange-looking constructions resembling enormous sentry-boxes, and some twenty-five feet in height. These were erected over the petroleum wells of Balahané and Sulahané. Entering Baku itself, the driver descended for a moment from his seat to tie up the bells hanging from the wooden arch above the central horse, the municipal regulations forbidding the entry of postal vehicles accompanied by their usual jangling uproar, lest the horses of the town *phäetons* should take fright. Baku merits a chapter of its own.

## CHAPTER II.

### BAKU.

Baku—Apscheron promontory—Country round Baku—Armenian emigrants from Turkish territory—Russian town—Old Baku—Ancient Tartar town—Old fortifications—Citadel—Bazaars—Mosques—Palace of Tartar Khans—Caspian steamers—Municipal garden—Mixed population—Bazaar held in aid of victims of Orenburg fire—National costumes and types—Nature of population—Banished Christian sects—Malakani and Scopts—Mercurius Company—Russian girls' dress—Origin of name of Baku—Bituminous dust—Laying it with *astatki*—Boring for petroleum—Distilling and purifying—Utilization of refuse for steamers—Probable adaptation to railroads—Island of Tcheliken—Fire temple—Guebre fire-worship.

BAKU, a few years back little if at all known to Europeans, is a place full of interest, and one destined to play an important part in the future of the Caspian regions. It is situated on the western shores of the Caspian Sea, on the promontory of Apscheron, which juts out eastward, and is the point nearest to Krasnavodsk, on the opposite littoral. The surroundings are of the same bleak and desert kind which characterises almost the entire circuit of the sea. In fact, the Steppes commence far west of the latter. For leagues around not a blade of grass is to be seen, and not even a shrub breaks the arid expanse of broken strata and scorched marl. Here and there, at long intervals, is a Tartar village, or the crumbling remains of some ancient Persian town. At midday not a living thing is visible, and the white glare of an Eastern sun reveals with painful distinctness every detail of the ghastly desolation. The houses are all of one story, flat-roofed, and built

of great slabs of kneaded clay dried in the sun. Were it not for the huge conical chimneys, which rise like watch-towers from the flat roofs, at a distance it would be impossible to distinguish these clay-coloured dwellings from the surrounding soil. Occasionally one sees a semi-subterranean Armenian village inhabited by emigrants from Turkish territory. These people adhere to their old system of construction, living in burrows covered over by low mounds of earth, and entered by a descending staircase. It is quite possible for a stranger, unaccustomed to these dwellings, to ride or walk across an entire village without being aware of its existence.

A semi-circle of rugged scorched hills of grey sandstone, highest towards the south, and dying away northward into the plain, encloses Baku on the land side. The northern portion of the town is altogether European in appearance, with yellow stone-fronted houses precisely similar to those of a Western Russian town. There is a large square, round which are planted a few stunted bushes and acacias. The orthodox Russian Church, of severely simple architecture, occupies the south-western side, just within the old fortifications; while on the northern side is an equally stern-looking Gregorian Armenian place of worship. Close by this square is the ancient Tartar town, the old fortifications still quite perfect, save where a couple of bastion towers show the yawning breaches effected by the Russian artillery some fifty years ago. The walls are lofty, solidly constructed, and flanked by numerous circular towers. A *fausse-braye*, or lower exterior rampart, adds to the strength of the place. The northern gateway is covered by a heavy stone ravelin, evidently of much later construction than the town walls. In the midst of the sea-front of the town, its eastern side, rises an immense circular tower, with massive outlying flank of

oblong plan, over one hundred and fifty feet high, and which at present serves as a lighthouse. Around its base are the ruins of the old bazaar, part of which is now converted into a school for children, and close by is the modern thoroughly Oriental bazaar, where, in a series of vaulted passages, opening in the roof, Armenian and Persian merchants sit cross-legged in the midst of an infinity of articles of almost every conceivable kind—bowls of spice, packages of starch and candles, rolls of calico, boxes of tea, cases of scissors, combs, brushes, ammunition, pipes, tobacco; in fact, it would be hard to think of a merchandise which these dealers do not each and all offer to the public. This tower is of considerable age, and was built during the reigns of the old Tartar Khans of Baku. Not far from it are some very old and solidly built mosques of bluish-grey stone, profusely ornamented with Cufic inscriptions, and bearing palpable marks of the Russian artillery fire. The streets are narrow, and the houses of the genuine ogive-windowed, flat-roofed Persian type. The old Tartar town, that lying within the ramparts, slopes up the hill on whose eastern side it is built, and at the top rises the palace of the former Tartar Khans, still in a state of excellent preservation, and now made use of as a Russian artillery depôt. For a mile along the water's edge are numerous piers, alongside of which steamers of a thousand tons can lie to discharge their cargoes. There are usually eight or ten merchant steamers in port, besides a couple of steam corvettes belonging to the Caspian flotilla. At the southern extremity of the town, immediately outside the old walls, a garden has been planted, which, owing to the entire absence of water and the bituminous nature of the soil, requires the most assiduous care to keep it in existence. The environs of Baku itself being entirely destitute of trees and flowers those of the public garden

had to be brought from Persia at a great expense. There are the yellow flowering broom (*Planta genista*), which in this climate attains the dimensions of an ordinary apple tree; large rose trees, and twenty others for which I know no name. Every Sunday and Thursday a military band plays from sunset until ten o'clock in the evening.

In the most cosmopolitan town in Europe it would be hard to match the mixed population that throng these gardens. Shortly after my arrival, a kind of bazaar was held in aid of the victims of the fire at Orenburg; and, perhaps, *in prospectu* for the victims of the coming campaign. The Red Cross Society presided. There were few nations in Europe unrepresented. All the more strange that few even know of this town of Baku—separated but by the Caspian's breadth from the borders of the vast desert reaching far away to the limits of Cathay and the regions from which Marco Polo brought back his tale of wonders. The expedition which was to penetrate into hitherto unknown regions away across the Steppes was represented at the gathering. Long white-robed Cossacks and blue-vested dragoons thronged the green alleys with training sabres, and mingled with an Eastern population. The eye is attracted by a reverend form reclining on a bench, under the shadow of the clustering trees. His long blue robe, coal-black plaited hair, and white turban bespeak him a priest. But he is one of a sect long passed away. He is the last priest of Zoroaster's creed that lingers yet in a region once all its own. He sits gazing dreamily at the shifting throng before him, thinking, perhaps, of the past glories of Iran, 'quenched with the flame in Mithra's caves.' Close by is a group of young men whose blue, green, or brown robes, and spotless white turbans, show them to be Softas, theological students, priestly aspirants of the Shiia Mussulman sect.

Their faces are handsome and well cut, but bear the unmistakable stamp of dissipation. In the throng which saunters along the leafy alleys under the twinkling lamps suspended from the trees are to be seen the costumes, all of them strongly contrasting, of Germans, Swedes, Georgians, Jews, Persians, Armenians, Poles, Russians, and Tartars, not to speak of those of the different religious sects which obtain in Baku. There is the Jew with his black cloth cap, sombre robe, and long staff; the Armenian, with sleek black silk tunic, flat-peaked cap of the same colour, and belt of massive pieces of carved enamelled silver; the Georgian, vested almost like the Circassian, with silver mounted cartridge tubes in horizontal rows on either breast, and guardless Caucasian sabre, the richly-mounted hilt entering with the blade up to the pommel in the leather sheath. The Russian peasant at all seasons wears the usual long sheep-skin tunic, the wool within, the amber yellow-tanned skin outwards, long leather boots, and a fur hat. The Tartar has his great woolly hat, like that of the Grenadier Guards, and a curious nondescript flowing robe of various colours. The Persian has one invariable, distinctive mark: his tall hat of black Astrakan wool, oval in section, the top often modified at the taste of the owner to a more or less mitred shape. The Swedes, Germans, Russians, and others of a superior class, all wear a strictly European costume. The couple of American engineers present wore a strictly Yankee garb. Among all the frequenters of the garden promenade, by far the most curious were those belonging to different Christian sects. From what I have learned from different sources it seems there was a moment when the efforts directed towards national unity of creed permitted of no departure from the strictly orthodox faith. Poles and Russians who held fantastic Nonconformist

ideas were relegated to the borders of the Caspian. In the case of the Poles there was probably also a certain mixture of political ideas. Among these religious sects, after the fire-worshipping priest, I shall mention but two—the Malakani and the Scopts. The first differ but little from the orthodox creed, save that they insist upon making use of milk and butter during the Lenten period. I was unable to distinguish any difference in dress between the male members of this congregation and the same sex of similar nationality. The ladies wear old-fashioned gowns with wide skirts of the brightest possible colours, emerald green and scarlet, lilac or blue. On the head is a handkerchief of variegated hues, knotted under the chin in Scandinavian fashion, the point falling between the shoulders. This sect is sub-divided into two sections. One considers it lawful to sing during Divine service, the other confines itself to slow dancing to the accompaniment of a monotonous drumming executed by some members of the congregation. I believe that in other respects both sub-divisions accept the usual dogmas. Of the Scopts, owing to their very peculiar ideas, I must say but little. They have curious notions about the possibilities of excessive population before the arrival of the Day of Judgment. They devote themselves to the production of capital and the limitation of offspring. One child is allowed to each married couple. Both sexes then undergo a peculiar and barbarous mutilation. This sect lies under the special ban of Russian law. It is a curious fact that all its component members inhabiting Baku, the only place in which I ever had an opportunity of seeing or inquiring about them, live in the same street, and are mostly bakers. The men are easily recognised in the streets by their melancholy, downcast air, and pale, shrivelled faces, as well as by their semi-Judaic garb. The German inhabitants

are few in number, either belonging to large commercial houses, or to the extensive petroleum works near Baku, about which I shall have something to say later on. The Swedes are mostly employed in connection with a steamship company founded by their countrymen, and which rivals the Mercurius, the Russian shipowners' company on the Caspian waters. Among the brightest and most graceful costumes in these garden promenades was that of some young Russian girls of the higher classes, who on gala occasions don the typical dress of the peasantry. This consists of a black or red skirt, with broad blue, red, and white parallel lines around the lower edge, turning sharply square at the corners like those patterns one sees in old Pompeian frescoes. A small black apron with the same border is added. A white muslin handkerchief crossed on the breast, knotted and pendant behind, and a wide-leafed straw hat with pendant edges, complete the costume.

The name of Baku means 'a place beaten by the winds.' Never did any locality better merit the appellation. Even in these hot summer months, when at times we lie gasping for a breath of air, sudden storms arise, sometimes from the seaward, sometimes from off the land. These storms raise clouds of dun-yellow dust, whirling in columns like the sand before the simoom. This dust has a particularly disagreeable nature, all its own. All around Baku the ground is sodden with natural issues of naphtha. In some places the earth is converted into a natural asphalte, hard during cold weather, but into which the foot sinks a couple of inches at midday in summer. Add to this that, owing to the scarcity of water, the streets are moistened with coarse black residual naphtha, a treacly fluid which remains after the distillation of the raw petroleum, and termed *astatki* in Russia. It effectually lays

the dust during fifteen days. After this period a thick brown dust lies four or five inches deep in the roadway, over which the numerous *phäetons*, or street carriages, glide so softly and noiselessly that the foot passenger is frequently in danger of being run over. When a north or west wind arises, the air is thick with impalpable marly earth, combined with bitumen. The least glow of sunshine fixes this indelibly in one's clothes. No amount of brushing or washing can remove it. Perhaps I cannot here do better than enter on a short description of the sources of mineral oil lying around Baku, which well merits the title of the 'Oil City' of the East.

The shores of Baku bay north of the town trend towards the east, and some five or six miles distant are the petroleum, or, as they are termed, the naphtha springs of Balahané and Sulahané, the former fifteen, the latter eighteen versts from the town. The surrounding district is almost entirely destitute of vegetation; and in its midst are some black-looking brick buildings, interspersed with those curious wooden structures, which I have mentioned in describing the approaches to Baku, twenty feet high, and resembling Continental windmills or gigantic sentry boxes. These latter are the pump or well houses covering the borings for oil, and in which the crude liquid is brought to the surface. The odour of petroleum pervades the entire locality, and the ground is black with waste liquid and natural infiltrations. Boring for naphtha is conducted much in the same manner as that for coal. An iron bit, gouge-shaped, is fitted to a boring bar eight or ten feet in length, which is successively fitted to other lengths as the depth of the piercing increases. This depth varies from fifty to one hundred and fifty yards, this difference existing even at very short horizontal distances, sometimes of not over forty yards. Layers of sand and rock

have to be pierced. It is in the sand that often the greatest difficulties are to be met with. A loose boulder will meet the boring tool, and, displacing itself, leave the passage free. But when the rods are withdrawn to allow the introduction of the tubes which form the lining of the well, the boulder falls back to its place, and baffles all attempts to continue the orifice. This boulder difficulty is the great terror of those commencing to bore. Sometimes, after a lengthened discharge of light carburetted hydrogen, the naphtha rises to the surface, and even flows over abundantly, occasionally springing fountain-like into the air to a height of eight or ten feet for hours at a time, as in the case of the artesian well. In such cases the ground around the boring is often flooded to a depth of six inches with the mineral oil, which, to avoid the danger of a conflagration, has to be let off by channels constructed so as to lead out to seaward. Under ordinary circumstances, it has to be drawn up from a considerable depth. The boring is generally ten, or at most eighteen, inches in diameter. A long bucket, or rather a tube stopped at the bottom and fifteen feet in length, is lowered into the well, and drawn up full of crude petroleum—fifty gallons at a time. This, which is a blue-pink transparent liquid, is poured into a rudely constructed, plank-lined trough at the door of the well house, whence it flows by an equally rude channel to the distillery. The distillation is conducted at a temperature commencing with 140 degrees—much lower, I am told, than the first boiling point for that from Pennsylvania. When no more oil comes over at this heat, the result is withdrawn and the temperature increased by ten degrees. This second result is also laid aside, and, the heat being again increased, a third distillation is carried on until no further easily evaporated liquid remains. This last is the best quality

of petroleum for lamps. That which preceded it is the second quality; and the first, or highly volatile liquid, is either thrown away or mixed with the best and second best as an adulteration. The thick dark brown treacly fluid remaining after distillation is termed *astatki*, and is that used for the irrigation of the streets. The distilled petroleum, if used in lamps, would quickly clog the wick with a carbonaceous deposit. With a view to obviating this, previous to being offered for sale it is placed in a reservoir, within which revolves a large paddle-wheel. Sulphuric acid is first added, and, after being allowed to settle, the clear top liquor is drawn off, and similarly treated with caustic potash. After this it is ready for sale. Up to the present, the residues, after the acid and potash treatments, have not been utilised. I have no doubt that valuable products will ultimately be derived from them. With the *astatki*, or remnant after the first distillation, the case is different. For years past this has been the only fuel used on board the war ships and mercantile steamers of the Caspian. At Baku its price is only nominal, vast quantities being poured into the sea for lack of stowing space or demand. It is used in cooking apparatus, and for the production of gas for lighting purposes. In the latter case it is allowed to trickle slowly into retorts raised to a dull red heat, pure gas with little graphite being the result. Weight for weight, this waste product gives four times as great a volume of gas as ordinary coal. By distillation at a high temperature and treatment with an alkaline substance, a product is obtained which is used as a substitute for oil in greasing machinery.

Apart from the local use of petroleum for lighting purposes, and its exportation for a similar use, is its application to steam navigation. With the old-fashioned

boilers in use, which have a central opening running longitudinally, no modification is necessary for the application of the new fuel. A reservoir, containing some hundred pounds' weight of the refuse (*astatki*), is furnished with a small tube, bearing another at its extremity, a few inches long, and at right angles with the conduit. From this latter it trickles slowly. Close by is the mouth of another tube, connected with the boiler. A pan containing tow or wood saturated with *astatki* is first introduced to heat the water, and, once the slightest steam pressure is produced, a jet of vapour is thrown upon the dropping bituminous fluid, which is thus converted into spray. A light is applied, and then a roaring deluge of fire inundates the central opening of the boiler. It is a kind of self-acting blow-pipe. This volume of fire can be controlled by one man, by means of the two stop-cocks, as easily as the flame in an ordinary gas jet. This I have repeatedly witnessed on board the Caspian steamers. As regards the expense, I give the following data on the authority of a merchant captain who has used naphtha fuel for years. His steamer is of four hundred and fifty tons, and of one hundred and twenty horse-power. He burns thirty pood per hour of *astatki* to obtain a speed of thirteen nautical miles in the same time. One pood is about thirty-three English pounds (16 kilogrammes), and costs on an average from five to six pence. Thus a twenty hours' voyage at full speed for such a vessel costs about twelve pounds sterling. The fuel is as safe as and occupies much less space than the amount of coal necessary to produce a similar effect, not to speak of the enormous difference in price and the saving of manual labour. Two engineers and two stokers suffice for a steamer of a thousand tons burden. In view of the immense supply of natural petroleum, as yet only very slightly developed, and its application

to the already guaranteed railway from Tiflis to Baku, and to the inevitable future ones beyond the Caspian over the plains of the far East connecting with that already constructed from Krasnavodsk to the new Russian possessions of the Akhal Tekké, I think this subject is worthy of every attention. Yet there are proprietors of large tracts of petroleum-bearing ground whose capital rests unproductive because of a want of demand. The island of Tcheliken, not far from Krasnavodsk, teems with the precious liquid. The seaward cliffs are black with its streams flowing idly into the sea; and a natural paraffin, or 'mineral wax,' is found abundantly in the island and in the low hills a hundred versts west of Krasnavodsk. All round Baku the ground is full of naphtha. In hundreds of places it exhales from the ground and burns freely when a light is applied. Only a couple of months before my visit its volatile products produced a remarkable effect a few miles south of Baku. A large earth cliff fronting the sea was tumbled over as by an earthquake shock, and, as I saw myself, huge boulders and weighty ships' boilers were thrown a hundred yards. In some places I have seen fifty or sixty furnaces for burning lime, the flame used being solely that of the carburetted hydrogen issuing naturally from fissures in the earth. This brings me to one of the most curious features of Baku and its environs. It was one of the last strongholds of the 'Fire-worshippers,' and I am sure that had Thomas Moore ever travelled so far eastward he would have made 'Hafid' figure rather on the top of the gigantic double citadel-tower (150 feet high) than on the peak of an imaginary mountain overhanging the waters of the Sea of Oman.

In the midst of the busy petroleum works of Sulahané and Balahané, where the chimneys of the distilling works no doubt far surpass in height the fire towers of old, is a

real specimen of the religious architecture and practices of ante-Mussulman days. After stumbling through the black naphtha mud, and over uneven foundations, a hole roughly broken in a modern wall gives entry to a small chamber, twenty feet by fifteen, adjoining which is a smaller one to the right. In the opposite wall and to the left is another low door opening on a semi-circular yard, fifteen feet wide at its greater diameter. It is the remaining half of a once celebrated fire temple, or rather of the small monastery connected with it. The exterior wall, eleven or twelve feet high, on which is a parapeted walk, is composed of rough stone. From the courtyard one can enter thirty-five roomy cells, accessible by as many doors. These were the cells of the former devotees of fire, or perhaps the accommodation for the pilgrims who came to visit the shrine, such as we see at celebrated religious tombs in Persia to-day. These cells formerly enclosed a circular space, one-half of which has been demolished or has fallen to ruin, and a modern wall through which one enters is the diameter of the circle. Looking northward, and supported by three double sets of pillars, is the ancient chief entrance, above which the parapet walk is continued. This entrance has been long walled up, and the only access is given by the hole broken in the modern wall behind. The cells formerly occupied by the monks or pilgrims are now rented at a moderate price to some of the workmen who belong to the factories immediately surrounding, by the priest, the last of his race, who still lingers beside his unfrequented altars. Near the western wall of the semi-circular enclosure is the real fire shrine. It is a square platform, ascended by three steps, of a little over one foot each in height. The upper portion of the platform is about sixteen feet square, and at each angle rises a monolith column of grey stone, some sixteen feet high and seven feet broad at the

base, supporting a gently sloping stone roof. In the centre of the platform is a small iron tube, where the sacred fire once burned. North, south, and east of this shed-like temple are three wells with slightly raised borders, the contents of which could at a previous period be lighted at will. Now, owing to the drain on the subterranean gases, this is no longer possible. In the chamber which we enter through the rough hole in the modern wall we find the only remnants of the old worship. The priest is called for. He is the same we have seen lounging meditatively in the gardens of Baku. He dons a long white robe, taken from a rude cupboard in the white-washed wall, and, drawing near a kind of wide altar tomb at the south-western corner of the chamber, railed off from the outer portion of the apartment by a low wooden balustrade, applies a lighted match, which he has previously sought for in a most prosaic manner in his breeches pocket, to a small iron tube. A jet of pale blue lambent flame is produced, rising to the height of eight inches or a foot. Seizing the rope of a bell hung over his head, he rings half a dozen strokes upon it, then takes in his hand a small bell, and, ringing it continually, proceeds to bow and genuflect before the altar, 'muttering o'er his mystic spells.' The lights wane gradually, and go out. And then, advancing towards the curious spectator, the priest proffers on a small brass dish a few grains of barley or rice, or, as I once saw, three or four pieces of candied sugar, which the envelope indicated had been manufactured in Paris! A person in the East always gives a present with the view of receiving at least fifty times its value in return; so we present the last of his race with a couple of roubles, and retire.

## CHAPTER III.

### ACROSS THE CASPIAN TO TCHIKISLAR AND CHATTE.

Interview with Lazareff—Voyage to Tchikislar—Reception by Turcomans—Their Costume and Dwellings—Fort of Tchikislar—Presents to Yamud chiefs—Akhal Tekké prisoners—Journey to Chatte—Russian discipline—Rain pools and mirage—Wild asses and antelopes—Fort of Chatte—Atterek and Sumbar rivers—Banks of the Atterek—Diary of Journey—Bouyun Bache—Delilli—Bait Hadji—Yaghli Olum—Tekindji—Review of Lazareff's regiment—Flies at Chatte—Tile pavements—Remnants of old civilization.

I CALLED upon General Lazareff at Baku, when I learned that he was about to start for the Eastern Caspian shore and the camp of Tchikislar, the immediate base of operations of the expeditionary columns destined for service against the Akhal Tekké Turcomans. On my asking permission to go with him, he very kindly said he would be glad of my company, but that the formality, at least, of requesting the consent of H.I.H. the Grand Duke commanding at Tiflis, must be gone through. In two days the requisite permission arrived, and I was directed to hand my papers to Colonel Malama, the chief of staff of the expeditionary forces. On the afternoon of Tuesday, April 2, 1879, with the General-in-Chief and his staff I went on board the Russian war steamer 'Nasr Eddin Shah,' bound for the camp on the south-eastern shore of the Caspian. Nothing could exceed the old General's kindness to me. I was his guest on board, and he took every opportunity of distinguishing me. On the following Friday, April 5, we anchored in front of the long, low-lying sandy shore off Tchikislar, but, owing to the extreme

shallowness of the water, we were obliged, at a distance of two and a half miles from it, to land in men-of-war's boats at the extremity of a rude pier, at that time reaching but some hundred and fifty yards out into the shallows. It was originally a kind of sand-spit, used by the Turcomans when discharging the cargoes of their *lodkas*. The General was received by some score of Yamud elders, who, drawn up at the extremity of the pier, offered him, as he landed, a cake of bread, a plate of salt, and a large fish newly caught; meantime, the guns in the small redoubt adjoining the camp thundered out their salute. The Turcomans of the entire surrounding neighbourhood had assembled to do honour to the General, and were drawn up on either side of the pier along which he passed to the shore. At its landward extremity, a number of Turcomans held prostrate on the ground half a dozen black-haired sheep, and, as he passed, a knife was drawn across the throat of each animal, the blood streaming, hot and smoking, across his path, and flooding the ground to such an extent that our shoes were all ensanguined as we walked in procession across it. It was the first time I had had a good opportunity of seeing genuine Turcomans. Each wore the enormous sheepskin shako affected by the inhabitants of Central Asia, and a long tunic of some bright colour, tightly girt at the waist by a broad white sash, knotted in front, a long dirk thrust through it. Over this was an exterior garment of some sombre tint, with long sleeves, which the wearers were continually pulling backwards in order to leave their hands free. Each, together with his poniard, wore a curved, leather-sheathed sabre, with cross guard. One might have imagined them a battalion of the Foot Guards, robed for the nonce in dressing gowns. Some, also, wore the enormous pelisse of sheepskin so common among the dwellers in Central

Asia, and which, doubtless, has been worn in those far-off lands from time immemorial. A person of an imaginative turn of mind might see in these primitively-clad Turcomans so many resurrected bodies of Cyrus's or Zenghis Khan's camp followers or soldiers. The camp was partly composed of regular Russian military tents, and partly of the circular, bee-hive-shaped Turcoman dwellings known as *aladjaks*, *kibitkas*, or *evs*. These are some fifteen feet in diameter, and twelve feet high to the centre of the dome-like roof, covered with felt an inch in thickness, the vertical portion of the walls being further bound round with a kind of reed matting. As I shall afterwards have occasion, in describing my visit to Merv, to speak of these circular dwellings more in detail, I shall now confine myself to a brief allusion to them.

The fortifications of Tchikislar were, in themselves, but very trifling. A low parapet of sand and a shallow beach surrounded a quadrangular space about two hundred yards square. In its centre was the *kibitka* of the Commandant; and not far from this latter was a tall signal station, composed of a platform elevated on a very tapering pyramid of poles to a height of sixty or seventy feet. This served the double purpose of a light-house at night and a look-out station during the day.

Immediately on his arrival, General Lazareff gave an audience to a number of chiefs of the Yamud Turcomans, and delivered to them a short and characteristic speech. He said that he had come among them as a friend, that he hoped they would offer no opposition to his march through their territory, and hinted, more or less vaguely, that the true objective point of the expedition lay far beyond their bounds. Among his audience were fifteen or sixteen Akhal Tekké prisoners captured during some recent skirmish in the direction of the entrenched camp of Chatte. The

majority of them were keen, intelligent-looking men, but among them were some faces of as ruffianly a cast as it has ever been my lot to see. With a view of propitiating their companions of the distant oasis, the General ordered the immediate release of these prisoners, and sent them away to their homes, giving to each some trifling present in money or articles of European manufacture. To them, as well as to the Yamud chiefs and elders, he gave silver watches, silver-mounted handjars, pieces of bright-coloured cloth, and such like articles, as he thought might be pleasing to them. On the following morning, April 6, a little before daybreak, we started for the advanced post of Chatte, at the junction of the Atterek and Sumbar rivers. The General led the way in a carriage drawn by four horses, his chief of staff following in another; then came half a dozen *troïkas*, exactly similar to those which I have described in relating my journey from Tiflis to Baku, carrying various members of his household, as well as the personal baggage. We were escorted by some two hundred Cossacks. Half a sotnia (fifty) rode a hundred yards in advance of the General's carriage, bearing the great black and white standard of their regiment; while the remainder, at a distance of two or three hundred yards on either flank of the *cortège*, rode in single file. Other detachments of horse had been sent forward to scour the plain, and to see that the road was clear, as well as to put the detachments of infantry, posted at various intermediate points along the road, on the alert. For upwards of four miles the road was an excessively disagreeable one, for the waters of the Caspian, under the pressure of a wind from the west, are often forced over the plain to the distance of more than a league. All over the first section of the road were deep accumulations of sand, into which the wheels of the vehicles sank deeply, and all the force of traction of the horses was

required in order to drag them slowly along. Two miles inland I saw the bleaching skin of the Caspian carp; and multitudes of sea anemones lay around. Far inland, too, we met with Turcoman *täimuls*, or dug-out canoes, lying about over the plains in the places where they had been left stranded by the retiring waters. Beyond this sandy zone the road became better and better with every mile of our advance, and ultimately we were careering along at the rate of ten miles an hour over a hard, white marly plain, as level as the best kept high road in the United Kingdom. As the day grew on, the heat became intense, and there continually stretched before us, to the eastward, one magnificent mirage, which made us imagine that we were but crossing some isthmus between one sea and another. Undulations and irregularities of ground showed in the midst of the silvery expanse like so many headlands and islands, and the atmospheric effects magnified the most trifling objects at a distance to extraordinary dimensions, a tamarisk bush or clump of camel thorn not more than eighteen inches high often assuming to our eyes the proportions of a crouching camel. Nothing could well be more picturesque than our long procession of carriages and *troïkas*, flanked by galloping Cossacks in their wild, semi-Eastern garb, as we dashed along over the burning plain towards the apparently unreachable water expanse stretching away eastward. The plain was, for the most part, dotted with scrubby, thick-leaved plants, belonging to the order of *Crassulaceæ*, or *Chiratan*, as the Turcomans call it, mingled with the ever present camel thorn (*yandak*), and a kind of lichen-like vegetable growth. Now and then we passed wide areas of ground entirely destitute of the smallest trace of vegetation of any kind. These were sometimes two or three miles in extent, and marked the spots where the winter rain-falls had lodged in immense sheets of water until over-

powered by the great mid-day heats of the spring and early summer. At other periods of the year I have seen these great shallow lakes undried by the sun; but so used had I become to the mirage that, when first I espied the glittering of the sea afar off, I could scarce bring myself to believe that it was not the oft-repeated atmospheric delusion which had so frequently beguiled me into a bootless ride of many a league in search of the wished-for water. On this present occasion, the spaces of ground upon which the water had lain during the period at which vegetation usually springs up with the little vigour it ever possesses in these dusty plains, presented a glaring white surface, as if the marl had been calcined in some mighty furnace, the water having, in fact, as effectually prevented germination as the fiercest sun-rays could have done. At two o'clock in the afternoon we reached the first station, Karaja-Batur, about thirty miles distant from Tchikislar. Here we found two companies of soldiers entrenched within a small rectangular redoubt, and a water party busy in excavating wells for the future use of the expeditionary force. Close by us was an old sepulchral tumulus, indicating the spot where a celebrated Turcoman leader, killed in some forgotten combat, was buried. Within the redoubt were a few *aladjaks* for the use of the soldiers, ordinary regulation tents being almost entirely useless as a protection against the sun. After an hour or two's rest we again set forward, the apparently interminable plain always presenting the same characteristic features. Camel and mule bones, bleaching in the sun, strewed every foot of the way—ghastly evidences of the dangers awaiting the traveller across these silent tracts. Save ourselves, not a living being of any description was in sight. Not even a prowling Turcoman was to be seen. In some places, where the great rain-pools were not yet quite dried up, the muddy soil bore the foot-prints of immense

numbers of antelopes and wild asses, the only creatures, excepting tortoises, lizards, and tarantulas, seeming capable of existence in this horrid desert. During all our journey we had not once caught sight of the river Atterek, for we were moving in a direct line along the cord of the circular sweep described by the river, which, besides, has excavated its bed to such a depth below the surface that it is entirely invisible until you arrive upon its very edge. Evening had long closed in, and we still continued our headlong course, some of the vehicles going astray in the darkness, and having to be sought for by Cossack pickets lest they should by chance fall across parties of Turcomans in the dark.

It must have been two hours after sunset as we reached Tekindji, the last station before Chatte. Here, again, were a small redoubt, and some *kibitkas*, on the floors of which we were glad to sleep until morning. Sunrise again saw us on our way, and we halted but once in a shallow ravine for breakfast. This ravine, apparently the bed of some considerable stream which once swelled the volume of the Atterek, is now destitute of a single drop of water. Here we were met by some Cossacks, sent forward from Chatte, who were supplemented by some three hundred auxiliary Yamud cavalry. By mid-day we were in sight of Chatte itself, with its signal and look-out station, precisely similar to that at Tchikislar, and surmounted by the Russian flag, towering above the whity wilderness around. Beyond Chatte, and across the plain to the southward, we could see ranges of low, rocky hills—spurs thrown off by the Persian mountains. The name Chatte, which signifies in Turkish a fork, implies that it is situated at the junction of the river Atterek with its tributary the Sumbar, which has its rise in the Akhal Tekké mountains. Chatte is one of the dreariest places imaginable. It is a moderately-sized entrenched camp, occupying a kind of peninsula, bounded

on two of its sides by the steep earth cliffs forming the sides of the Sumbar and Atterek respectively, and on the third, or western side, by a number of ravines and spaces of earth, honeycombed by running streams, which effectually protect it in that direction. In fact, it can only be entered by making a long *détour* to the northward, and then to the south, so as to avoid the many pitfalls around, and gain the narrow causeway which leads to its only available entrance. At the time of my visit the garrison consisted of two battalions. The heat was intense; and the cemetery, not far off, and ominously large for so small a garrison, spoke in eloquent terms of the unhealthy nature of the locality. Fully eighty feet below, in the midst of their tremendous ravines, ran the canal-like streams of the Atterek and Sumbar, at this time shrunk to comparative threads of water, all white with suspended marl, and almost undrinkable from the quantity of saline matter held in solution. This salty water, as well as the entire absence of vegetable food, seems to explain in a sufficiently satisfactory manner the disastrous prevalence of scorbutic affections among the troops and garrison at Chatte. Myriads of flies rendered life unbearable by day, as did gnats and mosquitoes by night; and the intense heat, aggravated by the simoom-like winds sweeping across the burning plain, made Chatte anything but a desirable abiding-place. 'I would ten times rather be sent to Siberia than left here any longer,' I once heard an officer of infantry exclaim to one of his newly-arrived comrades. Indeed, were not some other goal in view, it would be hard to imagine why life and gold were squandered in securing the possession of such a hideous wilderness.

As I have stated, during our two days' journey from Tchikislar we had not an opportunity of seeing the Atterek until the moment of our arrival at Chatte; but as on

another occasion I followed its banks from near the point where it forms its delta up to its union with the Sumbar, and as I do not intend again to recur in detail to this particular portion of the Trans-Caspian plains, I cannot do better than here subjoin the diary which I kept on the occasion alluded to, and which will give an accurate idea of the course and nature of this stream, about which so much has of late been said and written in connection with the Russian advance in Central Asia and the question of the Russo-Persian frontier. I was accompanying a battalion of troops, escorting a large train of provision and ammunition waggons, which was proceeding to Chatte, and which, occupying seven days *in transitu*, were compelled, in order to secure a constant water supply for the horses, to follow the very edge of the river.

'*September* 30, 1879.—I reached the station of Bouyun Bache this evening, after thirteen hours' march across a singularly barren expanse of desert. The battalion escorted a convoy of some hundred waggons laden with stores for the army, and was obliged to adapt its rate of marching to that of the heavy-laden, badly-horsed *arabas*. The soil of the desert ceases to be sandy ten miles from the Caspian shore. It is a heavy white loam resembling pipeclay, and, owing to the recent heavy rains, the wheels of the vehicles sank deeply, an occasional waggon sometimes sticking fast for twenty minutes before it could be disengaged. The horses' hoofs were laden with great masses of adhesive mud, which in no slight way impeded the march. I myself dismounted for a time, but was shortly obliged to give up walking, the mud masses attached to my boots making me feel like a convict with cannon-shot chained to my heels. Slowly as my horse plodded his way through the sticky mire, he made rapid progress in comparison to the main body, and at length I

pushed forward alone for our halting-place. In half-an-hour I was far out of sight of the column. Around, the miry waste was studded with bunches of wild sage, and a kind of plant of the botanical order *crassulaceæ* (in Turcoman *chiratan*), which even my Turcoman horse refused to crop. My sole companion was an Armenian servant; but he having, when leaving Tchikislar, indulged in too much *vodka* with his compatriots, took fright at the sight of half-a-dozen tall bushes which he supposed to be so many fierce Tekke horsemen, and I found myself alone in the desert. My only guide was the telegraph line to Asterabad, but there was a certain point at which I should diverge to the left. This point I could not distinguish, and so naturally I went astray. Night falls rapidly in the desert, and it was with no pleasant feelings that I vainly stretched my glance through the gathering gloom for some glimpse of a camp fire to indicate the station of Bouyun Bache. At night, especially when it is a starless one, to hesitate for a moment, to let your path deviate but a degree from the true course, is to lose the road hopelessly. Such was my case, and, recognising the situation, I made up my mind to wait for dawn where I was. I dismounted and lay down in the damp loam, trying to compose myself to sleep. An hour passed, and a faint bugle note came across the night air. I rose immediately and followed the sound. Then I heard voices singing, and so I stumbled into Bouyun Bache. The column had not arrived, and no one knew when it was likely to do so. It ultimately arrived towards midnight.

'The station of Bouyun Bache is situated on a gentle slope beside a marshy lake, surrounded by tall cane brakes, the haunt of wild fowl and wild boars. The lake may possibly be the summer remnant of the Atterek winter inundations, and never thoroughly dries up, for I

have seen fish and small turtles hooked by the soldiers on its banks. During the summer heats the district is extremely feverish. A company of infantry is permanently camped here; no cavalry save the daily Cossack patrols. The principal use of the post seems to be the holding in check of the Persian Turcomans at present occupying the winter pastures of the Atterek delta, and who have of late engaged in hostile descents on small Russian convoys going to Chatte.

'*October* 1.—We left Bouyun Bache an hour before daybreak this morning, *en route* for our next halting-place at Delilli. I had spent but a wretched night, trying to shelter from the heavy rain under a waggon. Hot as the days still are, the nights are wretched, and one welcomes the scalding hot weak tea which is invariably forthcoming at every halt if there be any possibility of lighting a fire. At the moment of starting I witnessed an example of the rather rude system of discipline occasionally enforced in the Russian service. The advanced guard, consisting of two companies, had fallen in, and were about to be sent off in advance of the first detachment of waggons. The major commanding the battalion noticed some awkwardness and confusion as the men took their places, and by way of seeing who was in fault, immediately ordered them to go through their facings. An unfortunate sergeant appeared not to be well up in his business, and bungled at every step, going exactly where he ought not to go at a given moment. I saw wrath gathering in the major's eye, and in another instant he dismounted from his horse, took off his overcoat with the greatest deliberation, handed it to his orderly, and then, providing himself with an exceedingly heavy horse-whip, beckoned to the unlucky sergeant to come towards him. The man, like his comrades, was, notwithstanding the rawness of the early dawn, dressed only in a light linen

tunic. When he stood to attention before the major, the latter proceeded to belabour him with all his might; and so rigid is the discipline of the Russian army, that the man dared not even run away or attempt to defend himself from the tremendous plaited leather thongs that went twisting around his all but naked shoulders. The beating, which lasted half a minute, terminated, the major restored the whip to its owner, put on his overcoat, and again mounted his horse, not a single remark having passed the lips of anybody.

'The sergeant took his place again in the ranks as if nothing had happened. Our march to-day has been a slow, dragging one. As usual after the first couple of hours' march, lingering along with the heavy-laden waggons, we were obliged to halt during half-an-hour to let the horses rest a little. At mid-day we had another halt, this time of over two hours, to cook dinner. It was close on sunset ere we reached Delilli, our halting-place for the night. There is no dwelling-place or camp of any kind. A wide marsh, partly covered with immense reed growths, reaches away to the Atterek, part of whose flooded delta it constitutes—like our last evening's halting-place, very unhealthy, the air reeking with the smell of decaying organic matter. Bent, the point at which the Turcomans dammed up the river to turn it further south, is some versts further on.

'*October* 2.—A little after leaving our last station we commenced crossing an undulating country seamed with immense rugged gashes, torn in the earth by winter rains. Four Turcoman guides rode some hundreds of yards ahead, carefully picking out practicable ground for the immense waggon train, which, when possible, advanced in three columns, and so avoided straggling, but sometimes was obliged to pass certain spots in single file. In this latter case the rearguard remained till all had passed, lest a

sudden swoop of the enemy might be made. I remarked great numbers of sepulchral tumuli scattered over the plain, some very large, other smaller ones grouped in their vicinity; some evidently very ancient, others marking the resting-places of Russian and Turcoman soldiers dead only a few months or even days before. About the middle of our day's march we began to remark palpable signs of the presence of the Atterek itself, streaks of verdure and unusually tall bushes making their appearance far off on the right-hand side. About four in the afternoon, turning by a sweeping path to the right, we arrived on the banks of the river. We camped in a wide level piece of ground, which gave evidence of being, under favourable circumstances, more or less of a pasturage. It was now, however, cropped quite bare by the great trains of cattle and horses which were continually passing. Above us, on two gently swelling hills, in an angle of the river, were camped two squadrons of Cossacks; for this point, at which the convoys pass, is quite close to the winter pasturages of the Turcomans on the Persian bank. It is at this station, named Gudri, that the banks of the Atterek suddenly assume that precipitous *cañon*-like form which they preserve up to and beyond Chatte. Immediately below Gudri they vary in height from three to seven feet; above it they suddenly rise to fifty or seventy feet. At the lower level, and on the southern bank, the ground partly enclosed by the numerous and very tortuous sinuosities of the river is densely overgrown with brushwood and tamarisk, the latter sometimes attaining the height of eight or ten feet. The antelope, wild boar, and *colon*, or wild ass, frequent the locality in great numbers. I saw some scores of large black hawks wheeling high in air. I believe they subsist on the mice which abound, and on stranded fish. The most objectionable frequenters of the place are scorpions and enormous

tarantula spiders. The latter, known here as the falang, or perhaps phalange, is as large as an ordinary mouse, of a chocolate colour, marked with black stripes and patches. One is obliged to look carefully into one's coat sleeves, boots, &c., before dressing, lest some of these ugly and really dangerous creatures have found lodging there. They frequent the tents and kibitkas, where the flies gather largely, and seem to be most active at night, especially when a camp fire or candle has been lit.

'*October* 3.—Reached Bait Hadji at sunset, after a fatiguing but very instructive march, during which the desert presented a completely new appearance, and indicated the vast difficulties of transport in autumn and winter, as well as in summer. We got into movement at about half-past four o'clock, the morning being very dark. The ground, too, was in many places so heavy that considerable deviations from the usual track had to be made. At first the desert presented the usual appearance—a white earth expanse dotted with bunches of scrub. Not a single blade of grass of any kind. Towards seven in the morning there were a couple of light showers; and the soldiers, who wore their white linen blouses and blue calico summer marching trousers, were obliged to run hastily to the waggons for their grey greatcoats. At length rain set in steadily, and it was with difficulty the troops could drag their mire-laden feet along. In expectation of hot dry weather they had doffed their heavy long boots, and wore instead linen rags tied round the foot and leg in the Italian peasant fashion, a leather sole or tight shoe being added. In fine weather this system is well adapted to marching. Now, however, the rags became saturated with muddy water, and from the enormous quantity of adhesive earth sticking to his feet each soldier had the air of a North American Indian wearing snow-shoes. They laid their saturated greatcoats

aside, preferring walking mid the downpour in their light linen blouses to carrying unnecessary and useless weight. The arabas and great four-wheeled fourgons, some drawn by four horses all abreast, were usually one-third the wheel's diameter buried in the soil through which they slowly crept, usually halting every ten minutes. The rain kept on steadily, and by ten o'clock in the forenoon, far as the eye could reach, was an expanse of water, broken here and there by slightly raised undulations of ground and tufts of brush. I had gone over this ground in the early summer, and, crossing the then scorched and burning waste, could never have imagined such a spectacle as the desert under water. Close as we were to the river, there seemed to be absolutely no surface drainage, the water lying motionless around. By mid-day the soldiers were mid-leg deep in water; and the waggons, often down to the axle, had to be forcibly spoked forward by the men. The camels alone seemed to get on at nearly their usual pace, though they splashed and slid about a great deal with their great splay feet, and groaned and grumbled even more than ordinarily.

'When the time for the two hours' halt arrived it was impossible to make soup or tea, for the usual fuel—the generally scorched-up sage brush—was saturated with water, and no dry spot could be found for a fire even if fuel were forthcoming. To start again seemed impossible; but, as a night's halt in such a place was out of the question, and would hardly better matters in the morning, we again set out, the front and rearguard men picking their way across the slime like so many flies over a treacly surface, and the waggons, urged slowly forward by the combined efforts of men and horses, resembling a fleet of barges crossing a marshy lake. During all this misery the troops were most cheerful, singing and laughing as they

waded along or spoked the waggons through the mud. I know it is a generally received opinion at home and elsewhere that Russian soldiers are kept up to their work by the distribution of unlimited rations of *vodka*. On the occasion to which I allude they certainly had no stimulants given them, nor have I ever witnessed the distribution of any to the soldiers. Yet, neither during that day's wet march, nor afterwards, was there a single case of illness arising from those twelve hours' continuous hardships. Towards sunset we neared the flank of a long escar-like sand ridge, where some drainage existed, and the ground, though cut up by deep channels, was still, on the whole, much firmer. Our night's camping-ground, Baït Hadji, is on the slope of a high earth-swell overhanging the Atterek bed. The place was entirely without garrison, and we found there only some two dozen waggons halted during the return journey to Tchikislar. On the top of the earth slope is an ancient *turbé*, or saint's tomb, partly earth and partly stone, where the individual from whom the name of the locality is taken is interred. Around are many large tumuli. The river bed, or rather the immense ravine through the midst of which the deep, narrow, canal-like water channel winds, is here nearly half a mile wide and seventy to ninety feet deep, the vertical flanks being torn into a thousand rugged and fanciful pinnacles.

'*October* 4.—Yaghli Olum, the fifth station from Tchikislar, is directly on the river's edge. It was formerly occupied by two companies of infantry—now it is deserted, an old redoubt alone marking the camp. To-day, unlike the preceding one, was extremely hot and dry, and the greater portion of the journey was on dry firm ground. Great quantities of bones and offal of all kinds lay about, on which over one hundred vultures and other large birds were preying. The river scenery here is imposing, but

the water is exceedingly bad, quite as white as milk with suspended marl. In fact, one would think that the tea or coffee made with it were mixed with milk. At this season, too, the water is more strongly impregnated with saline matter than earlier in the season, and is very unwholesome. The desert on both sides of the river is bare and arid, without a shred of vegetation. The first Persian hills lie southward, about six or seven miles off. Up to their slopes everything is utterly barren.

'*October* 5.—Another very hot day's march without incident to Tekindji, the last station before Chatte. The river banks steeper than ever. Wild pigeons in abundance. At night troops of jackals come shrieking into the very midst of our camp. In view of the absence of troops along the line, and of the bulk of the army beyond Chatte, a sudden attack by cavalry from the northward being possible, great military precautions were taken, a company of skirmishers moving far out to observe the approaches.

'*October* 6.—Being within twenty versts of Chatte I rode on quickly before the convoy, and arrived at my destination at about eleven o'clock. Between Tekindji and Chatte is a large deep ravine, crossing the road at right angles, and which must be very difficult of passage in wet weather. Close to Chatte I met troops of hundreds of camels, led by Yamud Turcomans, slowly making their way to Tchikislar, for provisions and general stores.'

Such are the notes I jotted down along the way just as I wrote them. It will be seen that at times the desert becomes impassable at certain places, for other reasons than want of water. The route which I have described, and which during the dry season is the only one practicable between Tchikislar and Chatte for wheeled vehicles, horses, and troops, becomes entirely closed during three

or four months of the year (November, December, January, and February), owing to the flooding and softening of the ground.

What I have seen of the Atterek at different seasons leads me to believe that even as far as Chatte it is entirely useless as a means of water transit. In autumn it is shrunk to a miserable, muddy ditch, at some places not over eight feet wide, and almost everywhere fordable to horses. That it occasionally assumes more respectable dimensions is evident from the various water-level marks on its banks. It must sometimes have a depth of over twenty feet, and an average width of thirty, without overflowing its regular channel, which is cut as even as that of any canal, winding in the centre of a vast ravine, with vertical sides. At places this ravine has a breadth of three quarters of a mile.

On neither the north nor south shores is the Atterek available for irrigation purposes, the great depth to which it has cut its bed precluding such a possibility. Hence the entire barrenness of the desert on either side, reaching from the commencement of its delta to over a hundred miles above Chatte. The extreme percentage of sediment makes its water unfit for human consumption without filtering or deposition; and for the supply of camels and horses it has to be fetched with great labour by zigzag steep paths cut in the huge earth cliffs of the ravine from the centre channel to the plain above. As a frontier line the Atterek has the advantage of being, except at its delta, exceedingly well defined and unmistakable. Were its depth at all seasons so great as to render it unfordable, that, taken in connection with the depth and steepness of its ravine, would render it as well a formidable barrier to the incursions of hostile nomads. As it is, its use from a military point of view, and that of its confluent the Sum-

bar, is simply that of a water supply of the main line of communication between Tchikislar and Chatte.

On the evening of the day of our arrival at Chatte, the irrepressible old General, notwithstanding the fatigues of the journey, was on his legs again, reviewing the old regiment to which he had formerly belonged, and in which he had once served in the capacity of sergeant—the Shirvanski. When the requisite manœuvres had been gone through, he called forward the 10th Company, that in which he had once served in a humbler grade of military life. He recalled to them the glorious feats performed by the regiment in the Caucasus during the old Circassian war, reminded them of his having been a non-commissioned officer in their ranks, pointed to the crosses upon his breast, and told the soldiers that by gallantly doing their duty each one might aspire to the position which he himself had gained. Tremendous cheers followed this harangue, and, as an inevitable result, the contents of a cask of *vodka* were distributed to the men, in which to drink to the health of the Commander-in-Chief.

After two days' experience at Chatte, I felt quite of the same mind as the officer who had said that he would rather be sent to Siberia than remain there any longer, for between heat and flies by day, and mosquitoes by night, I never passed such a miserable time in all my existence. There was a curious feature about the officers' *aladjaks* at Chatte. They were paved with large square tiles, a foot broad, which had been brought some thirty miles, from a place called Dusolum, situated higher up the Sumbar river, the site of a former town, but now desolate and bare as any spot which I have described. In view of the domed edifices and extensive foundations, spreading far and wide, there can be no doubt that a populous community once flourished there. Now, owing to the fact that the river

has cut its bed low down in the marly soil, and that irrigation is impossible, civilisation has perished from the spot. Very possibly, too, Zenghis Khan and his hordes had something to do with laying waste what are now trackless solitudes.

## CHAPTER IV.

### KRASNAVODSK.

Lazareff's opinion about Tchikislar—Difficulties of traversing desert—Chasing wild asses and antelopes—'Drumhead' dinner—A Khivan dandy—Desert not a sandy one—On board 'Nasr Eddin Shah' corvette—*En route* for Krasnavodsk—Gastronomic halt—Zakouska—Russian meal—Arrival at Krasnavodsk—Description of place—Distillation of sea-water—Club—Caspian flotilla—Lieutenant Sideroff—An ex-pirate—Trans-Caspian cable—Avowed object of Akhal Tekké expedition—Colonel Malama's explanation—A Trans-Caspian ball—Khirgese chiefs—Caucasian horsemen—Military sports—Lesghian dancing.

I WILL not trouble my readers with the details of the return journey from Chatte to Tchikislar, which was almost precisely similar to the first journey. General Lazareff had satisfied himself as to the state of his advanced posts, and had made a reconnaissance as to the nature of the ground. This done, he resolved to return to the western Caspian shore, and, provided with the information which he had gathered, take the necessary steps to meet all exigencies before finally committing himself to a forward movement into the heart of the enemy's territory. We stayed but a few hours in the camp at Tchikislar, during which time I had much conversation with the old general. We spoke at length about the eastern Caspian sea-ports, and canvassed the relative importance of Tchikislar and Krasnavodsk; the latter being the earliest Russian settlement on that side of the sea. He seemed altogether in favour of Tchikislar, notwithstanding its execrable anchorage. In his view the banks of the Atterek afforded

the only available route to Southern Central Asia. 'Tchikislar,' he said to me, 'will one day play a great part in the destinies of Central Asia.' At this period, the cable from Baku to Krasnavodsk had already been contracted for, but there was a question as to whether it should not be lengthened, and one station be at Tchikislar. From the moment that the 'Nasr Eddin Shah' anchored three miles off the coast, and I became aware of the nature of the anchorage, I had made up my mind that Tchikislar never could be an emporium between the Trans-Caspian and the opposite shore. I hinted at this to the General, but he smiled and nodded his head as if to imply that he entirely understood the situation, and I conceived that engineering works of great magnitude would probably be undertaken to render the place available for serious embarkation and disembarkation. It would have needed much to do this, and time has shown that my appreciations of the moment were correct. Tchikislar has been abandoned for Krasnavodsk, the military Russian settlement near which the Trans-Caspian railroad has its western terminal.

I was not sorry to find myself at the sea-shore again, for the backward journey had, if possible, been more disagreeable than the forward one. In the middle of one of the stages, the horses of the General's carriage, broken down by the rapid pace at which we were proceeding, had foundered, and we had to leave them behind us, gasping on the dusty plain. To replace them, Cossacks of the escort were ordered up. Each horseman, taking one of the ropes which served as traces, placed it under his left thigh, held the extremity in his hand, and then galloped forward with the surviving horses of the team. Even though the men were frequently relieved, we got on but slowly, and our journey back had been far more tedious than the one to the front. Utterly tired out with sitting in a *troïka*, I ex-

changed places with a Cossack, who, doubtless, was glad to get into the vehicle, and who, with his officer's permission, gave me his horse. The advanced guard, now that all danger was over for the moment, amused themselves with chasing the wild asses and antelopes which constantly came in sight as we topped some undulation of the ground, the horses seeming to enter into the sport quite as thoroughly as their riders, though we never had a chance of coming within shot. One of my last reminiscences of this journey was having supper with General Lazareff and his second in command, General Lomakin. We sat upon the edges of three drums, and bayonets stuck point downwards in the ground served us as candlesticks. In our company was the Caravan Bashi, a Khivan, whose dress merits description. He wore a silk tunic, of the brightest possible emerald green, with lavish gold embroidery; sky-blue trousers, of semi-European make; a purple mantle profusely laced; and, contrary to all Mussulman precedent, his fingers were covered with massive rings of gold. A gold-embroidered skull-cap was stuck upon the back of his head, and, perched forward, the brim almost upon the bridge of his nose, was a cylindrical cap of black Astrakan, which allowed almost the whole of the elaborately decorated skull-cap to be seen behind.

As I have mentioned, the plain, or rather flat valley of the Atterek, is exceedingly dreary and desolate, but it must not be understood as being in any sense of the word a desert, as we speak of the sand-strewn wastes of Arabia Petrea. The ground is excellent, and, if it be to-day in the condition I have depicted, it is only because water is not available. I have no doubt that if some enterprising engineer, under happier auspices than those existing at the time I visited the ground, were to construct dams upon the Atterek and Sumbar rivers higher up, near their sources,

so as to bring the waters once more back to the Trans-Caspian steppes, we might again see the fertility and prosperity amidst which were reared the walls and domes which now stand ghastlily amid the waste.

We arrived in Tchikislar about six o'clock in the evening, and I hoped to obtain a good night's rest, so far as such was consistent with the presence of great red-bodied, long-legged mosquitoes, but to my dismay an aide-de-camp announced to me that I must be ready to go on board the 'Nasr Eddin Shah,' the steamer which brought us over, at nine o'clock the same evening. We were to proceed, he told me, to Krasnavodsk. Far out to sea the yards of the ships were gleaming with lamps, for the naval officers had got up an illumination in honour of the Commander-in-Chief. The man-o'-war's boats took us half a mile out from shore, where we were met by a small tender, a kind of tug-boat, which conveyed us on board the war steamer. At ten in the evening, when Lazareff and Lomakin, with their respective staffs, had come on board, we got under weigh. At half-past eleven we came to a sudden halt, for which I was at a loss to account, as we were going steadily. I soon discovered that we had run in as close to land as was prudent, and let go the anchor in order that Lazareff and his staff might take supper undisturbed by the qualms of sea-sickness. We mustered pretty strongly at table. The General, who was especially sensitive to this plague of landsmen, was too sick to take his place with us.

There is one peculiarity about a Russian meal of which I may speak here. Immediately before seating themselves the guests proceed in groups to a sideboard, where what is called a *zakouska* is laid out. Caviare, cheese, pickles, butter, and a multitude of things the names of which I do not know, are placed around in saucers. In their midst stand two bottles, one of *vodka*, another of *balsam*. *Vodka*

is a kind of rude whisky, colourless as water. *Balsam* is an alcoholic solution of various aromatic herbs, and of intensely fiery quality. Each person fills out for himself a glass of *vodka*, flavours it with a few drops of *balsam*, and, having swallowed the mixture, proceeds to help himself to the various viands around, to such an extent that one would think an after meal entirely superfluous. Then one sits down to a more than solid meal. There is sturgeon soup, thickened with *borje*, a mixture which can best be described by stating that it is like stiff porridge made from blackish brown oatmeal; a spoonful of it is mixed up with one's soup. Then there are cutlets, which, at least on board a Caspian steamer, mean minced meat, massed round a bone, and made to do duty for mutton chops. A Russian dinner is a long affair, so that I will not enter into further gastronomic details. *Kakatinski* wine flows freely, and everyone is generally in good humour before he retires to rest. It was eight in the morning when, after having rounded the island of Tcheliken, we cast anchor in the bay of Krasnavodsk, than which no better could be found in the world. It is sheltered on all sides by rising ground, and has a depth of water which allows heavily laden ships of deep draught to anchor close in shore. It affords every protection against the treacherous westerly winds which so often sweep across the Caspian. Nearly the whole of the Caspian flotilla was at anchor, every ship gaily dressed with flags. The shore batteries fired a salute, and all the naval commanders, *en grande tenue*, came on board to pay their respects to the General. Among them was a Captain Schultz, who spoke English with that marvellous correctness of grammar and accent to be found, apart from the inhabitants of these islands, among Russians alone.

Krasnavodsk is literally a town 'made to order.' Everything is in the exact place that it should be in, from the

long rows of colonnaded villa-like residences on the margin of the bay, to the Governor's palatial mansion, symmetrical rows of barracks, and the orthodox Russian church in the middle of the great square. Krasnavodsk means, in Russian, 'red water.' In Tartar its name is Kizil Su. The Turcomans, for one reason or another, call it Shah Kaddam, 'the footmark of the King.' It is purely and simply a military colony. Three battalions occupied the place when I visited it. It is surrounded by an embattled wall, the ramparts mounting half-a-dozen field guns. A semicircle of scorched-looking hills forms a curve to the northward, each extremity of the arc resting upon the sea-shore. It would be impossible to conceive anything more bleak or desolate-looking than the scarped, scraggy cliffs of rose-coloured alabaster which face the town. Did it lie in the bottom of a volcano crater, the barrenness and dryness could not be greater. The natural water of the place, very limited in quantity, is absolutely unfit for human use. The position of the town had been fixed upon for strategic reasons, and as drinkable water was a necessity it has been supplied by artificial means. On the sea-shore, close to the extremity of one of the two piers, is an establishment for the distillation of sea-water. The wood fuel is brought, at an enormous cost, from Lenkoran, on the opposite Caspian shore. The distilled water is supplied regularly to the troops, and the few civilians within the place can obtain it at a trifling cost. Later on I dare say that engineers, by digging wells to an extreme depth, may possibly procure water fit for human consumption. In this regard as well as in all others connected with the sustaining of human life, Krasnavodsk is an entirely artificial place, and I must only suppose that in maintaining a military colony there the Russian Government attaches much importance to this particular position.

As I have already stated, the surroundings of the place are desolation itself. There are no resources whatever within hundreds of miles. Flour and other necessaries come from Baku, and wine, beer, and spirits are sold at a preposterous price. As is usual in even the tiniest and newest Russian military settlement, an extensive club-house is conspicuous at the upper end of the town. Here is a bar, looked after by a canteen sergeant, and a ball-room floored with wood mosaic, which in dimensions and style would not yield to many an older and more westerly town. Here, once or twice a week, is a gathering of the officers of the garrison and their wives and families. A military band plays in front of the terrace, and the evening is passed in the midst of gaiety and amusement that we should little expect to find in a desolate, rock-bound spot on the north-eastern Caspian shore. There has been an attempt at creating a public garden; but, owing to the nature of the soil and to the natural water, nothing save a few scrubby-looking tamarisk-bushes have been able to hold their own in the midst of the sandy soil and the scorching sun-glare. The greatest care is necessary in order to foster even these few bushes, which would look faded and miserable beside the most withered furze-bush that ever graced a highland mountain-top. Beyond the hills which guard the town stretches the boundless, weary desert, death and desolation written upon its scorched face.

There is as yet no town clock, but a soldier of the guard on duty beside the wooden church in the centre of the great square, each hour pulls at the bell-rope the necessary number of times. Apart from this, the bells have but little rest. The Russians are notoriously fond of bell-ringing, and as the Muscovite Easter happened to occur during my stay, I found that during that period scarcely

ten minutes elapsed between the different soundings. In the well-sheltered bay, and close in shore, were half-a-dozen Russian war-ships, which, as I have already mentioned, were decked out with flags in honour of the General's visit. These vessels are of about the dimensions of middle-sized Channel service steamers, and are armed with four to six twelve-pounder guns each. They were originally set afloat to check the piratism of the Turcoman maritime populations, for up to ten years ago the inhabitants of the eastern Caspian littoral acknowledged no central sway whatever. Now that all this is at an end, and the sea is practically a Russian lake, the war-vessels serve only to represent Russia, to convey troops and military stores, and to aid in keeping up postal communications. In the early days of Russian naval enterprise in these waters, there were many exciting scenes in connection with the chasing of the Turcoman luggers which were in the habit of carrying off Persian slaves from the southern Caspian coast. I once crossed the Caspian on board the Ural war-steamer, commanded by Colonel of Marine Sideroff, who, at the time of the occurrence which I am about to relate, was a lieutenant commanding a small corvette. Not far off the mouth of the Atterek he sighted two *lodkas* containing a number of Persian captives *in transitu* for the slave markets of Khiva and Bokhara. Lieutenant Sideroff fired a shotted gun athwart their bows, and made them bring to. He transferred to his ship ten captive Persians. The luggers were manned by seventeen Turcomans. Then the lieutenant withdrew a little, and, putting his vessel at full speed, ran down both the slave ships. Seventeen pirates perished. After this example piracy entirely ceased, and the addition of new war-ships to the Caspian flotilla rendered its revival impossible. For this prompt, and, as it proved, salutary act, the Shah of

Persia conferred on M. Sideroff the decoration of the 'Lion and the Sun,' of the second class. M. Sideroff is now an old man, and the anecdote I relate I heard from his own lips, as he sat at the head of the table on board the Ural war-steamer, which he commanded. The same evening he told me anecdotes about a certain old Moullah Dourdi, a renowned pirate of the Caspian littoral. He was a famous corsair, and his name carried terror with it. I had previously made the acquaintance of this gentleman at Tchikislar and elsewhere, and on those occasions had not the least notion of what he had been. At the time of which I now speak he was one of the principal commissariat contractors for the Russian camp; and to see him now, with his long robe of blue broadcloth; his coffee-coloured trousers of European cut; his European shoes showing immaculately white stockings; his black fur shako, a trifle less gigantic than those of his compatriots; and his well-cut face of grave though kindly expression, few would dream of what his antecedents had been.

Though the fortifications of the town are in themselves but trifling, against a Turcoman attack they might be accounted impregnable. A loopholed wall of brick, flanked by square towers armed with field guns, surrounds the settlement. At the date of its foundation a number of German colonists were introduced here, and one is occasionally somewhat startled at hearing the Teutonic language flowing glibly from the tongue of an individual brown as an Arab, and wearing the genuine Turcoman or Khirgese dress.

I have entered so far into details about Krasnavodsk partly because it is comparatively unknown, and yet destined to play an important part in the future history of Central Asia; and partly because I wish to have done with the place and enter into other matters more nearly connected with the title of this book. There is a postal

steamer once a week to Baku, and despatches can occasionally be sent by a war-ship starting on Government business. Two years ago the laying of the cable from Baku to Krasnavodsk was successfully accomplished, so that every day, for intelligence from Europe, the people of the settlement are no worse off than any other denizens of the Russian Empire.

At this point in my narrative I cannot do better than give the substance of a conversation which, on the occasion of a ball given by General Lomakin, the then Governor of the Trans-Caspian district, I had with Colonel Malama, the chief of Lazareff's staff, and with several of the superior officers. They were explaining to me the motives of the expedition against the Akhal Tekké Turcomans, and the ends which it was desired to secure.

'Krasnavodsk, having no *raison d'être* of its own, was founded specially as a maritime emporium of trade with Khiva, and Central Asia generally, in connection with the proposed railway from Baku to Tiflis, and that already existing from the latter town to Poti, whence Persian and other merchandise is conveyed by steamer to Odessa and other Black Sea ports. Khivan and other merchants have already crossed the Kara Koom (Black Desert) with their caravans, to Krasnavodsk; but so often have they fallen a prey to forays of the independent Turcoman hordes of the intermediate districts that commerce by this route has long since entirely ceased, and goods coming to Russia from Khokand, Tashkent, and districts bordering on China, are sent by the longer but more secure route of Fort Alexandrow and the Sea of Aral. The Turcomans who interrupt trade and carry on a systematic brigandage on every side, seizing indifferently Russian and Persian subjects, as well as their neighbours to the eastward, and retaining them as slaves, or holding them till ransomed, inhabit the district known as

the Tekké country. Its western boundary is close to the eastern Caspian shore, its eastern frontier is ill defined, and it stretches from the Persian frontier as far north as Khiva. These Tekké Turcomans are a most untameable, predatory race, and have existed from time immemorial in the same state of independence and aggressiveness. Their country is a savage wilderness, in which they shift to and fro according as the pasturage, such as it is, fails, or the wells become dried up. The object of the expedition was to break up the power of these hordes, establish military posts along the line of communication between Khiva and the Caspian, and otherwise guarantee the security of transit in the interior. The readiest means of effecting this would be an expedition direct from Krasnavodsk across the Kara Koom to Khiva, leaving entrenched camps at intervals. To make head against the Turcomans, however, a very large force was necessary, and the direct transit across the "Black Desert" for such a force is out of the question. The few wells which exist, situated at intervals of from ten to twenty hours' march one from the other, are entirely inadequate to supply water for any body of troops over a thousand in number, and the water is moreover of such a character as to be undrinkable by any one save Turcomans habituated to it from childhood. I have often heard of the "brackish water of the desert," but I had no idea it was so bad as it really is. It is strongly impregnated with common salt, sulphate of soda, and different other matters. On the stranger it has a strongly purgative effect, producing spasms of the stomach and intestines, and when it has become warm in the casks carried by the camels it is an emetic as well. Diarrhœa, always a serious evil in campaigning armies, becomes here of terrific prevalence. Apart from this lack of water there is no vegetation sufficient for cavalry horses, though camels seem to thrive tolerably well;

and, besides, a direct march to Khiva from this would leave untouched the main strength of the Tekkés, whence a continued war would be waged against the necessarily small military stations, and raids organised against the caravans and convoys passing over the long intervals between them. The first move, then, must be a purely aggressive one, and aimed against the hostile centres of power: the next, the establishment of posts along the route. It was at first intended that the expedition of twenty thousand men of all arms starting from Tchikislar, a little north of Asterabad, and situated on the Persian frontier, should, for the sake of water, follow the course of the Atterek river to Chatte, and thence continue along its banks as far as possible towards Merv, then turning northward and attacking the centre of the Tekké district. With a view to this, negotiations were opened with the Persian Government, for, by the treaty signed ten years ago between Persia and Russia, though the Atterek was agreed upon as the mutual boundary, it was only as far as Chatte; the Russian boundary then following the Sumbar river in a north-easterly direction. The negotiations having failed, it had been decided that the expeditionary force should, on arriving at Chatte, make its way along the Sumbar to the Akhal Tekké. The route is a difficult one; the river water is scanty, and charged with marly clay; but in any case the supply is better and surer than if the salt wells of the desert were depended on. Besides opening up a commercial route to Khiva and other Central Asian provinces, the expedition had another important object, that of enforcing the acceptance of Russian paper money as an intermedium of exchange. The Turcomans have little or no coinage of their own, their currency consisting of a heterogeneous mixture of Persian, Afghan, and other money, the value of which is but ill defined, and so fluctuating as to render large commercial transactions all

but impossible. It was proposed, after the happy result of the expedition, to force the acceptance of the Russian paper rouble; and, by way of beginning, large contracts were entered into with leading Turcoman chiefs for the meat supply of the army, to be paid for with paper money.'

Such was the explanation of the objects of the expedition and its intended route, as given to me by the chief of staff and other military authorities.

During Lazareff's brief stay at Krasnavodsk, the festive gatherings of the officers of the garrison, especially at General Lomakin's residence, were unintermitting. Dinner succeeded dinner, and ball succeeded ball. Within this period occurred the twenty-fifth anniversary of General Lomakin's marriage, which he celebrated, as is usual on such occasions, by a ball to the officers of the garrison, and the visitors staying in the town. To this were invited several Turcoman and Khirgese chiefs, who happened to be in the place contracting with the Russian commanders for camels. Never before had they been eye-witnesses of a European ball, and it was most amusing to see the expression of unconcealed wonderment depicted upon their faces, as they viewed the ladies in ball costume whirling round, in waltz and polka, with the military officers with clanking spurs and sabres. A Turcoman presents a sufficiently droll appearance to the eyes of a European, when seen for the first time, but a Khirgese is a still more extraordinary spectacle. Apart from his fur-trimmed robes, which are not unlike those of an alderman, his general appearance is Chinese. His hat resembles a stunted extinguisher of brown leather, round which is a bordering of lamb's wool or sable. This is the hat of a magnate. The ordinary Khirgese hat is a very remarkable head-dress indeed. It is like the other, save that at the back and sides it is prolonged into a kind of cape, a fur border following its edges.

As a rule the Khirgese are the reverse of handsome, and one of the nation wearing his usual head-gear would irresistibly remind a stranger of a baboon who had donned a fur night-cap.

Towards the end of the evening, or rather morning, supper was enlivened by a very characteristic incident. General Lazareff had proposed the health of his colleague's bride, and General Lomakin was returning thanks, when from the assembled company burst forth a demand that the old warrior should testify his affection for his partner by embracing her at the head of the table. In the midst of all this merriment the poor old General little foresaw the catastrophe which was so shortly to overtake him far away under the walls of Yengi Sheher, in the Akhal Tekké oasis. Sometimes we had reviews of the garrison, or of the irregular horse passing through Krasnavodsk on their way to Tchikislar, for it was by this route that the entire cavalry arrived at the latter camp. As I have already stated, the water for three miles off the coast is so shallow as to prevent a troop-ship from coming within that distance of the landing pier; consequently horses coming direct to the camp had to be transferred to Turcoman fishing-boats from the transport-ship, then conveyed to within half a mile of the shore, when it was necessary to hoist them over the side, and make them go ashore through the shallow water. At Krasnavodsk, on the contrary, the troop-ship can lie alongside the pier, and the greatest facilities are afforded for the debarkation of cavalry and artillery, which then proceed over land along the coast by Michaelovo to Tchikislar.

One evening, as we were lounging on the terrace outside the club doors, General Lomakin afforded us an opportunity of witnessing the peculiar method of fighting of the Caucasian and Daghestani horsemen who happened to be in Krasnavodsk for the moment. They are natives of the

north-eastern portion of the Caucasus, and are esteemed among the best cavalry in the Russian service. Their uniform is almost precisely similar to that of the Circassians, save that the Daghestani have their long tight-waisted tunics of white flannel instead of the usual sober colours affected by the Circassian horsemen. Hanging between the shoulders, and knotted around the neck, is the *bashlik*, or hood, worn during bad weather, and which is of a crimson colour. On either side of the breast are one or more rows of metal cartridge tubes, now worn simply for ornament, for I need scarcely say that these horsemen are armed with modern breech-loading carbines, and carry their cartridges in the orthodox regulation pouches, instead of after the fashion of their forefathers. Their sabres are of the usual guardless Circassian pattern, almost the entire hilt entering into the scabbard. Hanging from the front of the waist-belt is a *handjar*, or broad-bladed, leaf-shaped sword, very similar to the ancient Spanish weapon adopted by the Roman soldiery, or resembling perhaps still more those bronze weapons found upon the old battle-fields of Greece and within early Celtic barrows. These weapons they are accustomed to use as projectiles, much as the North American Indians use their long-bladed knives. On the evening in question, a squadron of these Daghestani horsemen were paraded, in order that we might witness their skill in throwing the *handjars*. A large wooden target was erected, in front of which was suspended an ordinary black bottle. Then, one by one, the horsemen dashed up at full speed, hurling their *handjars*, as they did so, at the mark. It was intended to plant the point of the knife in the target, so close to the bottle that the flat of the blade should almost touch it. One after another the knives of the whole squadron were thrown, until they stuck like a sheaf of arrows round the mark, and so good was the aim that in no one case would

there have been the slightest possibility of missing so large a mark as a man's body.

After this exhibition of skill, the Lesghi, as the Daghestani are occasionally called, performed some of their national dances, to the music of the pipe and tabor. Two dancers at a time stepped into the circle formed around them by their comrades. Each placed the back of his right hand across his mouth, holding the elbow elevated in the air; the left arm was held at its fullest extent, sloping slightly downwards, the palm turned to the rear. In this somewhat singular attitude they commenced sliding round the ring with a peculiar waltzing step; then, suddenly confronting each other, they broke into a furious jig, going faster and faster as the music increased in pace, and when, all breathless, they retired into the ranks, their places were immediately taken by another pair. Occasionally one of the more skilful would arm himself with two *handjars*, and, placing the points on either side of his neck, go through the most violent calisthenic movements, with the view of showing the perfect control he had over his muscles.

## CHAPTER V.

### KARA-BOGHAZ SULPHUR DISTRICT.

Gypsum rocks—*Odjar*—Natural paraffin—Post of Ghoui-Bournak—Camel-thorn and *chiratan*—Large lizards—Ghoui-Sulmen—Nummulitic limestone—Salty water—Method of drawing it up—Effect of washing—Turcoman smoking—Waiting for dawn—Shores of Kara-Boghaz—Searching for sulphur—Black and red lava—Kukurt-Daghi—Ghoui-Kabyl—Argillaceous sand—Turcoman and Khirgese horses—An alarm and retreat—Back to Bournak.

DURING my stay at Krasnavodsk, I made the acquaintance of an Armenian gentleman who had come there with the intention of scientifically exploring the neighbourhood, and discovering what its mineral resources might be. He was especially in search of certain sulphur mines reported to exist upon the shores of the Kara Boghaz, the great expanse of shallow water lying to the north of Krasnavodsk. He had succeeded in obtaining from General Lomakin a guard of fifteen Yamud Turcomans, acting as Russian auxiliary irregular horse, and, gathering from some conversation with me that I was interested in geological researches, asked me to accompany him on his expedition. We started early in the morning, and, mounted upon hardy little Khirgese ponies, climbed the horrid-looking, burnt-up ravines that lead through the amphitheatre of hills which guard Krasnavodsk, to the plain beyond. These rocks, as I have said, are of rose-coloured gypsum, though sometimes a blue and yellow variety is to be met with. Once outside the rocky, girding scarp, the Turcoman *sahra*, here afford-

ing an unusually luxuriant supply of coarse bent-grass, reaches away in one unbroken tract to the banks of the Sea of Aral. Here and there it is furrowed by great shallow ravines, their sides overgrown with tamarisk—*odjar*, as the Turcomans call it; and from the manner in which they run into each other I have little or no doubt that they formed some of the channels by which the Oxus traversed its delta when it flowed into the Caspian Sea. Even still some slight traces of moisture linger about their bottoms, sufficient to produce pasturage for the sheep, goats, and camels daily conducted thither from the town. The Yamud shepherds, perched upon every slight elevation around, kept watch and ward lest a party of Tekké Turcomans should sweep down upon them and bear both themselves and their charges into captivity. At the time of which I am writing some four or five thousand camels, destined for the transport service of the Akhal Tekké expedition, were concentrated in the neighbourhood of Krasnavodsk, the greater portion of them having been most unwisely sent to pasture at a distance of some twenty miles from the garrison.

Though it was early in the year, the heat of the sun was overwhelming; and as in the midst of our wild-looking escort we rode across these naked, burned-up plains, I could well appreciate how welcome was the 'shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' Far, far off, on either hand, loomed, faintly violet, some minor hills, which, my companion assured me, were replete with mineral treasures, especially with a very pure kind of natural paraffin, or mineral wax (*osocheryte*), as it is commonly called. Apart from the stray camels and flocks, the only living things to be seen were huge spotted lizards, who stared eagerly at us as we went by, and tortoises, crawling about over the marly surface, nibbling away the stunted *chiratan* around them.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon as we reached the Russian military post of Ghoui-Bournak, some sixteen miles distant from Krasnavodsk, and situated in the midst of a desolate plain. It consisted of a small rectangular redoubt, garrisoned by two companies of infantry and about twenty-five Turcoman horse. It was a frightfully desolate spot. There was absolutely nothing in the scenery on which the eye could repose itself after gazing over the illimitable wastes. Still, the garrison and their commander looked healthy and happy enough, owing, doubtless, to the cheerful *insouciance* and light-heartedness which characterise the ordinary Russian, and which serve him so well in a soldier's career. The captain shared with us his not very luxurious meal of dried Caspian carp and almost equally dry sausage, washed down by the never-failing glass of *vodka*, and then we again started on our forward journey. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon as, utterly overcome by the heat, we drew bridle for a short repose. There was abundance of scraggy, scorched-up vegetation around, in the shape of camelthorn and *chiratan*, but not a drop of water was to be had save what we brought with us in our leather sacks. Our halt was but a short one, for it was impossible to sleep, or even to rest, in the scorching heat of the sun, though none of those pests of the east, flies, were present—the spot was too inhospitable even for them. Though the country was for the most part bare and desolate, it was strangely accidented by shallow ravines, which were, indubitably, old watercourses, along whose bottoms and sides bushes of various kinds grew thickly. We varied the monotony of the journey by racing, and dangerous work it was, for the ground was everywhere burrowed into by great chameleon-like lizards—sometimes two feet long—and every now and then a horseman came to grief, owing to his steed involuntarily thrusting a leg into

one of these pitfalls. At ten o'clock in the evening we reached a kind of basin, situated in the midst of low hills, if I may call elevations of fifty feet or so by that name. This basin might have been a mile and a half across. Near its centre were half-a-dozen wells, which gave the place the name of Ghoui-Sulmen. Each well was surrounded by a low parapet of yellowish-grey nummulitic limestone, and close by the mouth stood a couple of rude troughs of the same material. The workmanship of these was of the rudest description, and I have no doubt, from the present condition of affairs on these plains, and the utter absence of public enterprise, that these traces of man's handiwork must be of great antiquity. The water lay at least forty feet below the level of the well-mouth, and could only be procured by being fished up in the nose-bags of our horses, let down by the united tethering-ropes of several of the party. This water was execrable in the extreme. I understand that it contains a large percentage of sulphate of soda and common salt ; but whatever be the matter which gives it its peculiar taste and flavour, it is very nauseous, especially when it has become heated from being carried in the leather bags in which water is stored during long journeys in these parts of the world. It then becomes emetic, as well as strongly purgative. Coming from the great depths at which it lies beneath the soil, it is icy-cold when brought to the surface, but even then it is intolerable to any one who has been accustomed to different water elsewhere. Not being able to drink, I tried to assuage my thirst by bathing my face and hands, but I soon discovered what a mistake I had made, for when the moisture had evaporated I found the surface of my skin covered with an extremely irritant saline matter, the eyes and nose especially suffering. The Turcomans prepared their tea with this water, and seemed to enjoy it, though after the first mouth-

ful I was obliged to cease drinking. The horses were watered by the contents of the nose-bags being poured into their troughs, but, as at least one-half of the water escaped through the porous sack while it was being hauled to the surface, the supplying of twenty horses with sufficient to satisfy their thirst, after our long and trying march, was slow work. We collected enough withered scrubby plants and roots to keep up half-a-dozen camp fires, around which our escort gathered, their horses being tethered close to them. I tried to put up my *tente d'abri*, but found that the pickets would not hold in the loose marly soil, so with my friend the geologist I was compelled to encamp *à la belle étoile*, like our neighbours the Turcomans. I tried in vain to sleep, for the irritating saline matter which my attempt at washing had lodged in my eyes, nose, and ears, rendered any effort in that direction quite unavailing; so I lay awake during our halt, gazing out into the solemn starlit silence of the desert, where not even a movement like that of the horizon-girded waters or the murmur of a ripple broke the unearthly stillness. Glimmering camp-fires shed fitful gleams upon the swarthy features and strange tuft-like hats of the Turcoman escort, bringing out all kinds of Rembrandt-like effects as they sat conversing around—for notwithstanding our fatiguing ride they did not seem in the least inclined to take any rest—or indulged in smoking after the curious fashion which they adopt on such expeditions as the one which is now being described. The Turcomans rarely smoke anything but a water-pipe, or *kalioun*, as they call it, but as this is too cumbrous an article to be carried about on horseback, a simpler expedient is resorted to. An oblong steep-sided hole is dug in the ground, some five inches wide, and a foot deep. Some red-hot charcoal is taken from the camp-fire, and placed in the bottom of the cavity. A handful of *tumbaki*, a coarse

kind of tobacco used in these regions, is thrown in, and the smoker, kneeling beside the hole, places his expanded palms on either side of his mouth, stoops over the orifice, and inhales the fumes of the tobacco, mingled with air. Three or four whiffs from this singular smoking apparatus seem quite sufficient for the most determined smoker among them, and I am not surprised at it. I nearly choked myself with the first when I tried it. When I first witnessed this method of smoking I was some distance off, and as the tobacco smoke was too faint to be noticed, I was under the impression that the Turcomans had somehow or other discovered water, and were engaged in drinking.

We broke camp about half-past one, and continued our journey towards the shores of the Kara-Boghaz (Black Gulf), on the borders of which lay the sulphur mines which it was the mission of my friend to explore. The stars gave but feeble light, and as the edges of projecting strata now began to make their appearance the road became so dangerous that after two miles we were obliged to halt again and wait for dawn. As the sun was rising we found ourselves on the margin of a vast creek reaching inland from the Kara-Boghaz. The waters lay still and death-like, and the entire surroundings were more lifeless and ghastly than any I had hitherto witnessed. Not even a bird of any description was to be seen, far or near. To reach the level yellow shore at the water marge it was necessary that we should scramble down the almost vertical face of the cliff, some sixty or seventy feet in height. It was composed of terraced layers of whitish-yellow stone, similar to that which I have described as being found at the well-mouths; in some places tossed and tumbled in the wildest possible confusion. Dismounting from our horses, and leading them by the bridles, we proceeded to scramble, as best we could, down the cliff, being often obliged to hold on by the

tamarisk bushes, and at last reached the shell-strewn beach below. Following the strand in a north-easterly direction, we reached a ravine which pierces the cliffs in an easterly one. This was the spot of which we were in search. It is called by the Turcomans the Kukurt-Daghi, or Sulphur Mountain. My friend commenced his search immediately, for there was not a moment to be lost. We were on very dangerous ground, and where the unfriendly nomads were frequently to be found encamped preparatory to one of their forays in the neighbourhood of Krasnavodsk. Strewn around were fragments of black and red lava, and the entire place bore unmistakeable signs of a more or less recent volcanic disturbance. Lumps of sulphur were to be found in every direction, and here and there were nodules, embedded between the stone layers, and in the indurated beds of detritus. Though we found tolerably large 'pockets,' however, nowhere could we discover any real vein. There was no considerable deposit of the substance—at least, such was the opinion of my friend, the geologist. After an hour and a half's search, we mounted for the return journey, and I was not sorry to leave the spot. The following brief extract from my note-book, written at the time, will express what I thought of the place:—'Kukurt-Daghi. An hour after sunrise. A cursed-looking place. Hideous desolation. Not a drop of drinkable water anywhere.' The waters of this Kara-Boghaz, which is an immense expanse almost entirely shut out from the Caspian, with which it is connected only by an exceedingly narrow strait, are an almost saturated solution of various sea-salts, mingled with an excess of sulphate of soda. No fish of any kind can live in them, and, as I have said, not even a solitary crow could be seen along its horribly desolate shores. It would be no inapt subject for the study of an artist engaged upon some landscape which was in itself meant to convey an

utter abnegation of life. After an hour and a half's examination of the sulphur deposits we rode back without further rest to the Sulmen wells, partook of some dry bread and salty tea for breakfast, and were able to sleep a little before the fierce midday sun put an end to our rest. We took a new route on our return journey, and, riding across a country exactly similar to that of which I have spoken, two hours before sunset we got into a sandy, undulating area. The tamarisk bushes grew high and close, and were even mixed with a peculiar kind of osier. This infallibly denoted the presence of water. We were, in fact, at the Ghoui-Kabyl, or sweet-water wells, the only place in the whole district where such a thing as really drinkable water is to be obtained. Here, again, the wells were so very deep that the nose-bags and tethering ropes had again to be put into requisition. The sweet water was welcome indeed. To me it seemed nectar after the burning thirst of so many hours. No one who has not been similarly placed can fully appreciate the force of the poet's words, 'The first sparkle of the desert spring.' One thinks himself passing through another phase of existence when he actually feels the cold water trickling down his parched throat. Our evening meal was as scanty as before. We had bread and water, but considering that the latter was fresh, the meal was a welcome one. We washed the salt from our hands and faces, and then, finding it utterly impossible, for the same reason as at the last halting-place, to put up our tent, lay down to rest upon the soft, yielding sand. This is the only place where anything like sand has come under my notice in these deserts. It is argillaceous, not silicious, and, unlike the latter, when moistened turns into mud. So fine is it, that when grasped in the hand it escapes between the fingers, notwithstanding every effort to retain it. Streaks and patches of it are to be found in all

directions, and I apprehend that they represent the beds of ancient watercourses. A bank of this yielding substance afforded as comfortable a couch as the softest feather bed, for it adapted itself perfectly to the form of the sleeper and was entirely free from saline particles. I am unable to understand the phenomenon of these three or four sweet-water wells existing in the midst of the desert, where all the other water to be found is of the nature of that which I have described as obtaining at Ghoui-Sulmen.

As usual, several camp fires were lighted, for the preparation of the inevitable tea, without which no true Central Asian or Russian can get through a day's journey. The fires smouldered dimly around us, for the Yamuds were too cautious to allow a blaze to be seen in such a place. As before, they did not go to sleep, but sat crouchingly around the fires, chatting to each other. The horses, each tethered by one fetlock at the full extent of its tethering-rope, ran round in circles, screaming at and trying to kick each other. I have remarked this peculiarity about Turcoman horses, that while towards human beings they are the gentlest and most tractable of creatures, among themselves they are the most quarrelsome that it is possible to imagine. There is a second peculiarity which I may as well mention here. On these steppes two principal varieties of horses are found—one the long-legged Turcoman, the other the stout Khirgese, which latter closely resembles an overgrown and extra-shaggy Shetland pony. Turcoman and Khirgese horses invariably fraternise, and live together on the kindliest terms, and I do not recollect ever having found an exception to this rule.

Notwithstanding the noise which the horses were making—and it was very aggravating, when after the fatigues of the past two days we were trying to snatch an hour's repose—I was sinking gradually into slumber. A calm

seemed to come over the bivouac, and everything appeared tranquil. I turned over on the sand to make myself comfortable, when I became aware that an unusual agitation prevailed among the ordinarily calm and taciturn Turcomans. They were whispering eagerly together. I raised myself upon my elbow, and looked round. Some were hastily saddling their horses, and before I had time to demand the reason of this proceeding, several of them came hurriedly up to where myself and my friend lay. There was something wrong, they said. The horses were sniffing the wind, with necks outstretched towards the east. Either strangers were approaching, or there was some other encampment near, and if this latter were the case, the encampment could only be a Tekké one. We held a council of war, and decided that the most advisable course to adopt was to move on immediately. Sand was heaped upon the camp fires, horses were rapidly saddled and packed, and, like a party of spectres, we stole silently away. Several Turcomans, with the apparently innate perception of locality, even in the dark, which is acquired by the habits of life of their race, led the way. For myself I had not the faintest notion towards what point of the compass we were directing our steps. During half-an-hour we forced our path among the bushes, and gained open ground. Four Turcomans were thrown out to reconnoitre in the supposed dangerous direction, and, anxious though I felt over the situation, I could not help wondering how they would ever find their way back to the main party, in view of the intense darkness, for a mist had veiled the thin lustre of the stars which had hitherto lighted us on. We rode as fast as the nature of the ground, with its lizard-burrows and old watercourses, would permit, and it was not easy to grope our way across all these obstacles. In an hour we were joined by the reconnoitring party. They

reported a large camp to the eastward. They estimated the number of its occupants at some hundreds, and believed they could be no other than Tekkés, inasmuch as no friendly force could possibly be in that direction at that particular hour. It was curious to note how these Yamud Turcomans feared their congeners the Tekkés. Only a few years previously both were banded together in common hostility to the invading Muscovite. A few years of Russian domination on the East Caspian littoral had transformed the former not only into friends, but into allies, and thrown them into the balance as a make-weight against their wilder Eastern brethren.

The sun was well above the horizon as we sighted several hundreds of camels browsing, on a rising ground, on the scanty herbage, and tended by some scores of Khirgese nomads. We hastily communicated to them the news of the proximity of the Tekkés, and rode forward, as swiftly as might be, after our protracted journey, towards the Bournak post, which we reached about two hours after sunrise. We reported our intelligence to the Commandant, Captain Ter-Kazaroff, who took the necessary precautions for the safety of his redoubt by placing men at the parapets, for he had not the slightest idea of what was coming, or that the Tekké horsemen would dare to execute the *coup* which they were preparing. He then proceeded to entertain us most hospitably, for it appeared that during our absence a provision convoy had arrived. He gave us wine, *vodka*, and ham, refreshment which we much appreciated after the starvation and fatigue of the preceding forty-eight hours.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A TURCOMAN RAID—A VISIT TO TCHIKISLAR.

Turcomans in view—Preparing to attack—In a predicament—Retiring on Krasnavodsk—General panic—Lomakin's advance—Result of skirmish—Russian military funeral—A trip to Tchikislar—Island of Tcheliken—Demavend—Ak-Batlaouk volcano—Difficulty of landing—Description of camp—Flies—Turcoman prisoner—Release of captive Persian women—Water snakes—Stormy voyage to Baku—Conversation with Lazareff—Russian recruits—Prince Wittgenstein—Cossack lieutenant's story—Off to Tchikislar.

I HAD slept a couple of hours at the shady side of the Captain's tent, and was in the act of making some notes of the day's adventures, when scouts came galloping up in a headlong fashion with the news that the Tekkés were advancing in force, and that not a moment was to be lost if the camels were to be saved. Notwithstanding that a border post like that of Bournak is constantly on the alert, the rapidity with which the men were got under arms was surprising. The captain rushed from his tent, the bugle sounded, and in less than two minutes after the alarm the first company was moving to the front at the double. As the day was exceedingly hot, the men marched in their shirt sleeves—at least I suppose it was on account of the heat; in all probability an order to that effect had been issued, as everyone in the company was without his coat. The irregular Yamud cavalry, some fifteen in number, together with the Khirgese shepherds, were driving in the

camels, which could not, however, be got to accelerate their usual slow and dignified pace. Owing to this fact, many of the Khirgese were cut down by the foremost Tekké horsemen. I believe that in all there were about four thousand camels. So rapid was the preparation that the captain had not even time to load his revolver, and I lent him mine for the occasion. The promptitude with which he marched to the relief of the camel drivers was beyond all praise. Within ten minutes after the departure of the first company, the second, in reserve, marched with the camels carrying the spare ammunition, leaving only half-a-dozen men to garrison the redoubt. The first company was scarcely five hundred yards distant from the parapets when the leading Tekkés appeared in sight, galloping along the summit of the long undulation of the plain, and in a few minutes many hundreds of them were in view. Some affrighted Khirgese drivers who came in said that the greater number of their companions had been killed, a large proportion of the camels taken, and at least two thousand sheep swept away. They reported that the Tekkés were at least two thousand strong, and that a large number of them were horsemen, the remainder being infantry mounted upon camels and asses. Firing had already commenced, and myself and my friend were sorely puzzled as to what course we should pursue. The position, for us, was an exceedingly difficult one. I much desired to go forward and witness the skirmish, but the condition of our horses, after two days' hard riding, with little or no food save the few handfuls of corn which we had in our saddle-bags, rendered it excessively dangerous for us to proceed into the press of combat, especially as it was as likely as not that the slender Russian infantry force would be compelled to retreat, even if it were not annihilated. In the latter case, and with our jaded horses, we were

certain to be captured, and mutilation, if not death, would have been our portion. To await the result of the fight in the redoubt, with its few defenders, was equally precarious, for in the event of the Tekkés being victorious they would have little difficulty in overwhelming the few men who remained behind. To retreat was fraught with danger also, for as the Tekkés were in great force a party had probably been detailed to cut off communication with Krasnavodsk. Further, as they seemed for the moment to be retiring before the two companies of infantry, we thought it best to make good our retreat, while there was yet an opportunity, as fast as our fatigued horses could carry us. Our baggage was rapidly packed, and we retired as swiftly as we could. Half a mile to the south of the post of Bournak is another reach of ground commanding an extensive view over the plain, and from this, though at a pretty long distance, I could, with the aid of my field glass, follow the movements of the Tekkés. It was not easy, however, to make out which way the combat was going, for the entire plain was covered with groups of horsemen, and it was impossible to detect to which side they belonged. Once outside of the protecting parapets of the redoubt, our most prudent course was to make the best of our way to Krasnavodsk.

Our worn-out horses took at least three hours to cover the eighteen miles which intervened between us and that town. I had serious reason to believe that a turning movement would be attempted, this being a favourite Turcoman tactic; and we were more than once scared by the appearance of groups of horsemen, driving camels and sheep before them, and spreading all over the plain between us and Krasnavodsk. If they were enemies it was useless to attempt to escape, so we pushed on, and found that we had been alarmed by the shepherd popula-

tions, who were hastily retiring on the town with all their flocks and herds. The panic was universal, for the news had spread that the Tekkés were in very great force indeed. The heat was terrific, our horses were rapidly failing us, and I was in a general state of weariness. We entered the rocky circle of hills which shuts off Krasnavodsk and its immediate surroundings from the plains, and as we debouched from one horrid gorge, with its gaunt cliffs of burnt red rock, we met General Lomakin, the commander of the town, advancing with all his available forces. He had a battalion of infantry, several squadrons of Khirgese lancers and Cossacks, and one field gun. He could not, in the whole, have had less than twelve hundred men. I very much wished to turn back and accompany the advancing forces, but the condition of my horse rendered such a proceeding entirely out of the question. I had a short conversation with the General, explained to him all I knew about the situation, and once more pushed on to Krasnavodsk. I found the garrison under arms upon the ramparts, and the artillerymen standing by their guns. The naval officers on shore had been hurriedly summoned on board their respective war-ships, and everything showed that a serious attack was deemed possible. As I entered the town the people crowded round me, anxiously questioning me as to what was the matter, and where the General and his troops were going. A little later I met one of the Yamud horsemen who had formed part of the escort of myself and my Armenian friend. He gave it as his decided opinion that we must have been under the direct protection of Allah as we got off from the Ghoui-Kabyl that morning. Had we remained an hour longer on the spot, he said, we should certainly have been captured by the Tekkés. I was really very much knocked up by the expedition. The heat, want of sufficient food, salty water,

and, above all, the absence of sleep, had quite prostrated me, and I find in my note-book the following entry, which is very descriptive of the situation:—'I am very ill, and my back is nearly broken. My nose is almost burned off, and my breeches are torn from hard riding. I must go to bed.'

My readers may be curious to know what the upshot of the whole affair was. I give a brief account, as taken from the lips of various persons who were present at the engagement. The Tekkés gave battle twenty-five versts beyond Bournak, losing fifteen men killed. The Russians lost four irregular horsemen. The Tekkés captured some hundreds of camels, but could only carry off about two hundred of the swiftest. They were also forced to leave the captured sheep behind them. The captain of the Bournak post did not venture with his slender force to pursue the enemy further. General Lomakin, on his arrival at Bournak, halted for the night, and on the next day re-commenced the pursuit. The enemy retreated before him, occasionally halting within a circle of captured camels, which they made to kneel down, using them as a rampart, and firing over their backs. Occasionally the range was only fifty yards. They fired, from their smooth-bore muskets, spherical leaden bullets, split in four pieces, and wrapped in paper. These missiles are admirably adapted for use on horseback, and inflict very uncomfortable wounds indeed. In the end they withdrew so far into the desert that the General thought well not to follow them any further. The Russian loss on this occasion was four men killed and twelve wounded. One dead soldier was discovered with six sabre gashes on his head, his nose had been cut from his face, and he had undergone other mutilations. A woman who had been captured by the marauders, but who slipped through their hands, said that they sacked several *aoulls*

(villages), carrying off women and children and murdering the men.

Thus ended the first of the series of combats with the independent Turcomans which culminated in the capture of their strongholds at Geok Tepé and the conquest of the Akhal Tekké tribes. These same tribes, who fought so fiercely against the Russians but three years ago, have now, to all appearance, become as much their obedient servants as the Yamuds of the Caspian littoral, who but seven years previously were themselves among the foremost opposers of Muscovite aggression. Few governments like that of Russia would know how to conciliate these newly conquered Asiatic peoples; as an example of this I may mention that there are many Turcomans who are already decorated with the cross of St. George. This cross, which is of silver, and in form not unlike the Victoria Cross, ordinarily bears on a central medallion a 'George and the Dragon.' The Turcomans objected to receive a decoration bearing a strictly Christian emblem, and accordingly a number of crosses were manufactured especially for them, bearing a double-headed eagle instead of a 'George.' The Turcomans are under the impression that this strange-looking fowl is a cock, as they themselves often told me. This cross, charged with a 'cock'—as well as neck medals hung by variously coloured silk ribbons—has been largely distributed among the reconciled nomads.

Two days after my arrival at Krasnavodsk, I witnessed there the obsequies of three of the four regular troops killed in the skirmish beyond Bournak. The fourth, being a Mussulman, did not share in these ceremonies. They took place within the wooden church standing in the centre of the square. Like most Russian church-singing, the chanting on this occasion was exceedingly sweet, and the rites were of the most impressive character. All the officers

and most of the soldiers of the garrison were present, each one holding a slender lighted taper in his hand. When the coffins were about to be closed, each of the comrades of the deceased came forward to kiss the foreheads of the corpses, at the same time dropping a few grains of rice into the folds of the shroud. A sergeant then approached, and placed across the brow of each a slip of gilt paper, on which was written some inscription which I could not decipher. The coffins were then closed, and carried outside the church. A procession, headed by military music, was formed, and marched to a distance of about two miles outside the town, and around a rocky promontory to the cemetery. The 'pope' of the garrison, with long dark robes, violet velvet 'toque,' and silver-tipped staff, walked beside the coffins. The interment concluded, the three customary salvoes were fired by a squad of the battalion to which the deceased had belonged. The dead Mussulman soldier was buried far apart, on the bleak hill-side. As we turned again for Krasnavodsk, I noticed, at intervals, many an old earthwork and trench, with an occasional soldier's grave, surmounted by its lonely wooden cross, marking the gradual progress of the Russian arms from the first settlement within the Krasnavodsk hills to the present outlying stations. Immediately outside the walls was quite a colony of soldiers' wives and children, and camp followers of one kind or other. They were not allowed to occupy ground within the place itself, for in Krasnavodsk the dwellings are either barracks or the quarters of officers and their families. It is only in the bazaar, as one of the great squares is named, that any civilians are to be found, and these are traders from Baku. The people who live outside the walls inhabit semi-subterranean houses like those of the Armenians to which I have previously alluded.

I remained at Krasnavodsk up to the first of May,

awaiting a definite move on the part of the expeditionary forces. In the interim I made a trip to Tchikislar on board the 'Ural' war-steamer. During this excursion I had a good opportunity of examining the island of Tcheliken, with its steep seaward marl cliffs, stained by the black flow of naphtha which has gone on for ages pouring its riches into the unprofitable bosom of the Caspian. On one of its highest portions is one of the tall, sentry-box looking objects which stand over the petroleum wells worked by Mr. Nobel, the enterprising capitalist of Baku. Not far from it is the *turbé*, or monumental tomb of a celebrated Turcoman saint, which attracts many pilgrims from the mainland, and serves as a landmark for shipping a long way out to sea. Nearing Tchikislar, one catches sight of the huge cone of Demavend, the mountain which overhangs Teheran, hovering like a gigantic white triangular cloud above the southern horizon. Some versts north of the camp, and four inland, is the mud volcano known to the Turcomans by the name of Ak-Batlaouk. This is in a state of constant activity. It presents the general appearance of an oblong mass rising abruptly from the plain to a height of some hundreds of feet, and made up of a series of truncated cones of whitish-yellow colour. The craters on its summit emit sulphurous vapours, and occasionally overflow with boiling mud. It is generally in a condition of extra activity immediately before the occurrence of one of those numerous earthquake shocks which are experienced all along the eastern and southern Caspian shores. It is doubtless an evidence of the widespread volcanic action which within a recent period, geologically speaking, has raised the Turcoman plain beyond the reach of the waters, and which is doubtless still in progress. Though tradition speaks of the bed of the Oxus having been shifted from the Caspian to the Sea of Aral by human agency, I am very

much inclined to think that the gradual elevation of the Caspian littoral had more to do with the change.

On May 3 we cast anchor off Tchikislar, and, on account of the extreme shallowness of the water, had the usual difficulty in getting ashore. The steam-launch took us within fifteen hundred yards of the extremity of the impromptu pier. When we could go no further in this we hailed one of the numerous Turcoman luggers (*lodkas*), which, crowded with the former occupants of the steam-launch, had scarcely made fifty yards when her keel began to scrape against the bottom. She took us within three hundred yards of the pier, and within about eight hundred of the shore. Then a kind of raft was brought out, the soldiers, a little over their knees in the water, pushing it. This also got aground, and we were obliged to change into a number of small canoes, dug from single tree trunks, and rtemed *täimuls*, in which we managed to get so near land as to be obliged only to splash on foot through fifty yards of surf and wet sand. This will give some idea of the difficulty of landing horses, cannon, or any heavy material. On this occasion the extra shallowness was due to the winds being partly off shore, and forcing the water westward in the same manner that it is forced inland eastward when the wind prevails in an opposite direction. One could scarcely believe how very gradual is the deepening of the water, and the long distance out at which a person may wade. I have seen bathers up to their arm-pits, apparently not very far from the horizon.

Tchikislar, which I understand is now almost deserted, was, at the time of which I speak, in all its glory. Several thousands of men were under canvas, the cavalry to the north, the infantry to the south of the original sand redoubt and signal station. Between them, and southward of the fort, were a couple of streets of hastily-constructed wooden

houses, erected by the Armenian and Russian sutlers and general dealers, who invariably accompany the march of any considerable force. These dealers were doing a brisk business, charging enormous prices for every article which they sold. Without a single exception, each one of these establishments, if not primarily intended as a drinking shop, supplemented its other business, whatever that might be, by the sale of *vodka* and other spirituous liquors. Further southward, along the shore, were the commissariat and slaughter houses; and not far off, somewhat inland, immense piles of grain sacks and mountains of hay began to rise—the commencement of the accumulation of stores for the supply of the troops about to march to the interior. The immediate environs of the camp were in a disgracefully filthy condition, Russian commanders seeming, in this regard, singularly careless, and neglecting the most ordinary sanitary precautions. As a consequence, much sickness prevailed, and the hospitals were full. Attracted by the filth and fostered by the intense heat, myriads of flies clouded the air on every side. In the little wooden 'shanty' where I found a lodging, each movement conjured up a perfect storm of flies, and at night the air was thick with red mosquitoes, which, however, fortunately did not sting very severely, or else existence would have been impossible. At no hour of the day or night were these winged pests absent. There seemed to be relays of different species of them for each section of the twenty-four hours, which regularly relieved each other. I have often had my notes rendered almost unintelligible half an hour after they were written, owing to the dense covering of fly-blows upon the paper.

A mile to the south of the main encampment, and close to the water's edge, was what remained of the once populous Yamud *aoull* of Tchikislar, which at the time I speak of

contained little more than a hundred *kibitkas*, inhabited mostly by families attached in one way or another to the service of the camp. They fetched wood in their *lodkas* from Lenkoran, on the opposite side of the Caspian, or from the mouth of the Kara-Su, near Ashuradé. I remained only two days at Tchikislar, for besides the landing of corn and forage nothing was being done there. On the evening of the 5th I again went on board the 'Ural,' in order to return to Krasnavodsk. We had on board a Turcoman prisoner, who was in custody for having offered armed resistance to the giving up of a Persian woman who had been carried off from the South Caspian shore. In many of the *aoulls*, even in the immediate vicinity of the Russian camp, and along the Atterek and Giurgen rivers, large numbers of captured Persian women are still to be found. Many of them, having married among the Turcomans and had families, are completely reconciled to their position, but there are others who retain the desire to visit their homes again. The circumstances in connection with which my fellow-passenger was a prisoner were as follows. At the mouth of the Atterek river is the large village of Hassan Kouli. Detained there as a captive was a Persian lady of good family, who had been spirited away from her home during a Turcoman marauding expedition. After two years, her relations discovered her whereabouts, and made application to the Russian authorities at Teheran, begging them to restore her to her family. She being detained on what was claimed to be Russian territory, an order was issued to the officer commanding the naval station at Ashuradé, not far off the mouth of the Giurgen, directing him to see that the fair prisoner was at once set at liberty. A Turcoman was immediately despatched to visit her captor, and it was decided by the elders of the village that she be given up in accordance with the demand. Her

former proprietor was furious, and bitterly upbraided his compatriot the messenger for having undertaken such a mission. 'Don't you know,' said he, 'that we Turcomans *never* give up our prisoners?' This was literally the case, for it had always been a rule among the Turcomans, and is so still at Merv, that in default of ransom or exchange the prisoner is never to be surrendered—he or she is massacred on the spot in preference. As the messenger was leading away the liberated captive from the door, her former owner, stepping back into the *kibitka*, seized his gun, and levelling it at the envoy, fired. It was charged with split bullets, and the pieces lodged in the man's arm. The aggressor was the prisoner whom we had on board. The relatives of the wounded man declared that if the culprit paid the necessary blood money—*eric*, as our Celtic forefathers would have styled it—he would be forgiven; otherwise they would call for justice against him. The Russian officers on board told me that he would probably be sent to some town in the central portion of European Russia, there to reside for three or four years. After having become duly impregnated with Western ideas, and having observed some evidence of the might of Western civilisation, he would be sent back to his home. It is in this fashion that Russia has been able to transfer to far-off regions the influence of her power and resources, which, going before her standards, has often served to open up an easier road to her battalions than they might otherwise have met with.

I remained only ten days longer at Krasnavodsk, leading the accustomed life—*soirées* at the club, dinners at the governor's, and driving about the neighbourhood. During one of the last excursions I made along the rocky shores of the bay, I was struck by the immense numbers of water snakes which, leaving the sea, had gone long distances inland. I have met snakes of between five and six feet in length, of

a yellow colour mottled with brown, by threes and fours at a time, crossing the scorched gypsum rocks at least half a mile from the shore, and making their way to the water, into which they plunged and swam out to sea. From on board ship I have seen them in the waters of Krasnavodsk Bay—five or six knotted together—floating upon the water in the sun.

On May 15 I was sent for by General Lomakin, who informed me that General Lazareff desired to see me immediately, and accordingly, on the following day, at one o'clock, I started for Baku, where the Commander-in-Chief was temporarily staying. I took my passage on board a large transport steamer, whose engines were unfortunately not of very great power, so that when we cleared the point of land which guards the harbour against tempestuous winds, and met with a perfect hurricane outside, the most we could do for a long time was to hold our own. We were forced to run under shelter of the Island of Tcheliken, and wait until the winds had moderated. It was only on May 18, at two o'clock A.M., that we cast anchor under the lee of a small island five hours' steaming from Baku. The ordinary passage from Krasnavodsk to Baku occupies about thirty hours. Again and again we tried to enter the harbour, but as often were driven back and obliged to re-anchor. It was four o'clock on the morning of Monday when we came alongside the pier. Baku certainly deserves the title given to it by the old Tartars, 'a place beaten by the winds.'

On the following day I had an interview with General Lazareff, who wished to obtain some unbiassed evidence about the affair at Bournak, in view of the complaints which had reached him from different quarters relative to the want of promptitude of General Lomakin in hurrying to the assistance of the two companies defending the camels. He asked me whether I believed it was not pos-

sible for Lomakin to have pushed on the same evening and followed up the enemy. I have already stated that as I rode in towards Krasnavodsk I met the General in question hurrying forward. I had no other answer to give than that I believed he had acted with the greatest possible promptitude, but that as I was not on the ground on the second day it was impossible for me to say what his conduct on that occasion might have been. General Lazareff then asked me if I thought that in the coming expedition the Turcomans would offer battle in any considerable numbers. If they did so, he said, it would shorten the campaign, as it would at once enable him to strike a decisive blow; but he feared it would be otherwise, and that they would adopt a Parthian style of fighting. He had sent them a letter stating that they should either immediately express their willingness to become Russian subjects, or else prepare to fight well. They had returned no answer save the raid on Bournak, which he considered as throwing down the gauntlet, and as evidence of the adoption of an irreconcilable policy. It was quite possible that we should have to winter in the Akhal Tekké, and he declared his intention not to return until he had accomplished his mission—the 'pacification,' as he was pleased to term it, of the district. Further operations depended upon eventualities. Should the Merv Turcomans take part with their brethren of the Akhal Tekké, he would be obliged to move against Merv, but at present he had no definite instructions in the matter. He concluded by saying, 'We must do nothing in a hurry; we have plenty of time before us.'

Baku was fast filling with the expeditionary troops, and in the streets I saw almost every variety of uniform belonging to the Russian service. Raw levies of the Trans-Caucasian regiments were being diligently drilled in the great squares, and on the esplanade beside the old walls,

and though these white-coated soldiers were, as far as arms and accoutrements could make them, members of a European force, their physiognomies distinctly stamped them with an Asiatic type. There were Armenians, Georgians, and Circassians united in the same company, and occasionally, but only very occasionally, a Mussulman Tartar. Their divisional banners were certainly of a very Asiatic type. One day I was watching a detachment of newly uniformed recruits, who were at drill in the open space opposite the Governor's palace. When they broke up they separated into various groups, and marched away in irregular order, singing to the beating of large drums. With some of the larger groups were square red banners, surmounted by an inverted brass dish set round with small jangling bells, and which was bobbed up and down to the time of the singers' voices. It exactly resembled the apparatus which is borne at the head of a Turkish band in Constantinople, and from the top of which formerly floated the horse-tails which denoted the Pasha's rank.

During my very brief stay in Baku on this occasion, I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Ferdinand Prince Wittgenstein, commander of the cavalry of the expeditionary force, and of General Count Borch, the chief of the infantry. The former told me that he commanded a division of cavalry at the great battle of the Aladja Dagh, at which Mukhtar Pasha and the Turkish army were overthrown, and that he had had a very narrow escape of being shot by the Turkish Circassians, having ventured exceedingly close to them, mistaking them for his own men, their uniforms being almost precisely similar to some of those who were serving under his command.

One of Prince Wittgenstein's officers, a lieutenant of Kouban Cossacks, told me an amusing story about the manner in which he had arrived at Baku. Being greatly

pressed for time, and fearful lest the General might depart without him, he was continually hurrying the driver of the *troïka* which brought him from Tiflis, and when within one stage of Baku insisted upon his putting on extra speed, adding threats of the direst kind in the event of non-compliance. The Tartar driver was so terrified by the language used towards him that, leaping from his seat, he rushed nimbly across the country, leaving the gallant officer to conduct the three-horsed vehicle as best he could. This he was compelled to do, and he appeared at Baku, much to the amusement of his comrades, seated upon the foremost edge of his rude chariot, endeavouring to guide the by no means manageable horses.

Baku is not at all an agreeable place to stay in, and I was not sorry to receive a notification from the Chief of Staff to go on board the 'Constantine' mail steamer, to accompany General Lazareff across the Caspian to Tchikislar. It was towards evening that, having made my preparations, and packed together the stores requisite for a prolonged journey into the interior, I took my seat in a remarkably Parisian-looking *fiacre* or *phäeton*, as the Russians style that species of vehicle, driven by a big-hatted Oriental, and proceeded to the pier. General Lazareff, Prince Wittgenstein, General Borch, and Colonel Prince Dolgorouki—the latter attached to the army in some capacity which we could never understand—came on board. And so I once more turned my back upon the town of Baku, not now for the first time in Russian hands, for it was captured by Ivan the Terrible, the celebrated Czar of Cossack race, in the year 1450. As its crenelated walls faded from view, I could not help thinking of the former phases of the Eastern Question which were associated with those sun-tinted towers and bastions, and how closely they were connected with the latest one.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TCHIKISLAR SKETCHES—ATTEREK DELTA.

Khirgese and Turcomans at Tchikislar—Cossack and Caucasian horsemen—Peculiar customs with regard to dress—Samad Agha—The Shah's cousin—Hussein Bey and Kars—Nefess Merquem—Turcomans in Russian service—Camp police—Tailless camels—The knout—Baghdad muleteers—Decorating soldiers—Camp customs—Soldiers' games—Races—Tchikislar bazaar—Night alarm—The pig and the pipe—Military ideas about Asterabad—Turcoman graves—Bouyun Bache—Foul water—Smoking out the flies—Horse flies—Sefid Mahee—Abundance of fish—Running-down partridges—Waterfowl and eels—Wild boar hunting—Atterek delta—Giurgen—Ak-Kala—A Turcoman and his captive wife—Lazareff's decision.

THE 'Constantine' anchored off Tchikislar on the afternoon of Monday, June 3, as usual nearly three miles off shore, and we had the accustomed difficulty in landing. The arrival of the Commander-in-Chief with his staff, and the presence of some additional battalions which had preceded us, greatly added to the liveliness of the camp; but with this exception things went on as usual, and I do not purpose repeating what I have already said about the place.

One of the most peculiar characteristics of Tchikislar was the presence of very large numbers of Khirgese and Turcoman camel drivers, and of muleteers from Baghdad, who, under promise of high pay, had been induced to abandon their ordinary track between the latter city and Meshed, and to come to the Russian camp for the transport service. There is a very wide difference between the appearance of the Khirgese and that of the Turcomans. The latter are of a more or less slim and wiry figure, with

approximately European features. They wear the huge sheepskin hat, and make a very fair attempt at a regular system of clothing. The Khirgese is as quaint-looking, awkwardly-dressed a figure as one could find upon a Chinese porcelain dish—the same impossible eyes, long, narrow, and dragged upwards at the outer corners, genuine Cathay hat, and occasionally an umbrella, which would not be out of place in a procession of stage mandarins; a shuffling, slovenly, heavy gait, much more ungraceful than the walk of a ploughman. His ordinary garment is a kind of dirty cotton sheet, twisted anyhow about him, or at most a very draggled and tattered linen tunic. In a burning sun he wears as much furry clothing as an Esquimaux. On his head is a movable conical tent of felt, which falls to the middle of his back, and which towards midday he supplements by another, and perhaps a couple of horse-cloths besides. Seated on the scorching sand, with his stolid mien, peeping eyes, and strange head-dress, his general appearance is that of one of those squatting Indian deities of a pagoda, clothed in rags and skins. He is much more solidly built than the Turcoman, and, with the exception of the eyes, bears a close resemblance to the Oozbegs of Khiva.

There were large numbers of Caucasian and Cossack horsemen, all in picturesque attire, and looking quite unlike anything we are accustomed to associate with the uniform of a regular regiment. Both Cossack and Caucasian wore tunic-like garments, fitting tightly at the waist, the skirt falling almost to the heels, and made of white, brown, grey, or black cloth. The breast was covered with one or two horizontal rows of silver or brass cartridge cases, according to the rank of the wearer. They all bore the guardless Circassian sabre, the whole of the hilt of which, save the top, enters into the scabbard. The Russian

officers serving in Asia for the most part affect this style of weapon instead of the regulation sword, carrying it by a belt slung across the shoulder, instead of girt around the waist. There is a trait of character noticeable among the officers of Caucasian cavalry regiments, among the Kabardian officers especially, which is worthy of notice. Each one feels bound to have both arms and belt mounted as massively as possible with enamelled silver; cartridge-boxes, tinder-boxes, poniards, and other accoutrements being decorated with equal richness. Many, however, regard a new coat, or one that shows no sign of wear, as entirely inadmissible and unmanly, and altogether in *mauvais goût*. When the dilapidation of a garment compels the wearer to order a new one, he straightway deliberately tears it in several places, and with his knife frays the edges of the sleeve, in order to give it the appearance of having seen service; and so well is this peculiar taste recognised, that the tailor has been known to send home a new habiliment with the requisite amount of tatters, and with the lower part of the cuff artificially frayed. We had in the camp a band of irregular cavalry, formerly professional robbers and marauders from the neighbourhood of Alexandropol, who were told off for the special duty of harrying the enemy's flocks and herds. They were under the command of a well-known brigand chief named Samad Agha, a Karapapak. These also affected the same style of dress and arms as the Caucasians.

Among those attached to Lazareff's staff was a dragoon officer who was a cousin of the Shah of Persia. His brother is attached to the Cossacks of the Imperial Guard. Their father, the Shah's uncle, has been exiled by his nephew, the reigning sovereign, either through some whim, or on account of the fears with which that monarch is troubled anent his own particular dynasty. A short

time after our arrival there came to the camp, with offers of military service, a certain Hussein Bey, a Turk whose mother has long been known in Europe as an authoress, and whose book upon life in the harem created a sensation some years ago. Hussein Bey himself is the author of several books, among them being one which I saw at Constantinople some time ago, 'Les Imams et les Dervishes;' and shortly after his visit to Tchikislar he published a very interesting letter in the *Temps* of Paris, extending over three or four columns, entitled 'Comment nous avons pris Kars.' In this he disclosed the fact that secret correspondence had been going on between his namesake, Hussein Bey, colonel of artillery within the place, and the Russian camp outside, and that communications were kept up in which he took a leading part. Why the services of this gentleman were refused I do not know, but almost immediately afterwards he left the camp, having, I understand, for one reason or another, received a large gratuity from General Lazareff. Another remarkable person who figured in the camp was a certain Nefess Merquem, a Turcoman chief, and former khan of a large *aoull* near Krasnavodsk, which had been totally destroyed by a Tekké raid, himself and his son only escaping from the universal carnage. This Yamud elder was charged with the organising and command of five sotnias (five hundred men) of Yamud Turcoman cavalry, to serve against the Akhal Tekkés in the ensuing campaign. This will give some idea of the manner in which the Russians utilise these tribes against each other, and in which they will probably employ their newly-won subjects of Yengi Sheher and Askabad.

The police of the camp were under the direction of a Mussulman Armenian from Erivan, whose name I do not recollect. He discharged his functions with great effectiveness. The police administration of a Russian camp is

prompt and severe, and conclusive evidence is by no means always requisite in order that stringent measures may be put in force against a supposed delinquent. On one occasion a servant of mine embezzled a richly enamelled silver belt which I had bought as a souvenir of Armenia, and refused to restore it. I reported the matter to the chief of police, and the defaulting servant was invited to return the article. He denied all knowledge of it, and was ordered to quit the camp within twenty-four hours, and not to return without permission. *A propos* of police administration, I saw at Tchikislar an example of what I had been led to believe was abolished in Russian rule—punishment by the knout. Large numbers of Khirgese and Turcomans had been hired, together with their camels, to serve in the baggage train of the expedition. They received a fixed sum per diem for the services of themselves and their animals, and in case of any camels succumbing to the fatigues of the road, or being captured or disabled by the enemy, the owner was compensated to the extent of one hundred roubles in paper for each camel—a sum then equal to about ten English pounds. Many of these people brought with them only the very weakliest of the camels in their possession, knowing that they would not be able to dispose of them at so good a price elsewhere, and took the first opportunity, when on a long journey, to abandon them in the desert. In cases of this kind they were required, in proof of their assertions, to bring in the tails of the camels which were supposed to have died. A party of Khirgese and Turcomans were despatched with material from Krasnavodsk, and directed to follow the shore to the camp at Tchikislar. They abandoned their camels on the way, having first cut off their tails, which they duly brought into camp. Lazareff's suspicions were aroused, and he ordered a party of cavalry to proceed along the track by which the camels

had passed, and to scour the country in search of their bodies. The horsemen came upon the camels, which were calmly grazing over the plain, in as good condition as ever they were but for the absence of their tails. The evidence against the culprits was overwhelming, and in order to make an example, and prevent the repetition of this fraud, each was sentenced to receive, upon the bare back, a hundred blows of a Cossack whip. This instrument in no way answers to our idea of a whip. It is more like a flail. The handle is of whalebone or cane, with flat leather thongs plaited round it. The thong of an ordinary whip is replaced by a similar combination, and united with the handle by means of a stout leather hinge. The delinquents were bound, stretched upon their faces, a Cossack sitting on the head of each, and another on his feet. Their backs were then laid bare, and the hundred blows were inflicted. They were severely cut up, but notwithstanding the suffering undergone, not a single cry or groan escaped their lips. Each seized with his teeth some morsel of his clothing, to prevent his exclaiming, and doggedly underwent the punishment. Among these people it is considered very disgraceful to allow any amount of pain to wring from one of them any groan or exclamation, and I have been told that the man who exhibits such sign of weakness will not afterwards be able to find a woman to marry him. When I happened to observe to a superior officer that I had believed the punishment of the knout abolished in Russia, he frankly replied that it was, but that the General took upon himself to administer this summary chastisement, inasmuch as the men themselves would infinitely prefer it to being sent to prison in Baku, or perhaps to Siberia; and he was probably right.

The Arab muleteers from Baghdad stayed but a very short time in the camp. They were so frightened by the

tales they had heard of the sufferings in the Turcoman desert, and so imbued with fear of the wild Tekké horsemen, that they forfeited the wages paid to them in advance, and retired again to Persia. I understand that many hundreds of Arabs were on the way to Tchikislar, but that they were stopped at Asterabad owing to the representations made by the British Consul to the Persian local authorities.

Some days after his arrival, General Lazareff decorated with the Cross of St. George two soldiers who had distinguished themselves in the skirmish against the Tekkés at Bournak. The battalion to which they belonged, and another, paraded for the occasion, and the General conferred the decorations with his own hand, at the same time presenting each with a money gratification, whether from his own pocket or otherwise I am unable to say. Immediately afterwards I witnessed a singular custom, which appears to be put in force on such occasions. When the ceremony had terminated, the men broke ranks, and the newly decorated soldiers were felicitated by their companions, who straightway seized upon them, and placing each one in a tent sheet held by eight stout men, tossed them into the air, repeating this operation with most troublesome rapidity. This was a kind of roughly good-humoured way, in accordance with consecrated usage, of extracting from them a promise to treat their companions to *rodka* on the strength of the gratuity which they had received. All through the proceedings the greatest good temper prevailed, both among the tossers and the tossed. On the same evening, on paying a visit to a major of Cossacks, with whom I was acquainted, I saw an example of the manner in which Russian soldiers occasionally amuse themselves when in these remote places. A stake was firmly planted in the ground, and two ropes, each some

twenty feet long, were attached to it, the extremity of each being held by a blindfolded soldier, who carried in his right hand a stout piece of rope about three feet long. Holding the ropes extended to their full length, they were placed at opposite sides of the circle which they would be obliged to follow, and the signal was given. Each listened intently, to try if he could discover the approach of his adversary. In case he did so, he fled before him, naturally moving in a circle. If one could steal a march upon the other, he belaboured him with his rope's end, a dozen blows, I believe, being the maximum number permitted at a time. The performance seemed to delight both the major and the remainder of the spectators. I have remarked on all such occasions the unfailing good temper with which the severe knocks, often amounting to downright ill-treatment, are received by these soldiers at each other's hands. In fact, I do not remember having on any other occasion met with an exhibition of so much good nature, under such trying circumstances, as life in the camp of Tchikislar brought under my observation. We had races, too, as well to break the monotony of existence as to test the quality and powers of the officers' horses, for only officers' horses were permitted to join in this sport. I have seen Colonel Prince Galitzin and other officers of rank ride their own horses on these occasions, the prize for the winner, given by General Lazareff, being a somewhat curious one—a pound of ice, made by his own refrigerator, for I need hardly say that natural ice was not to be had within any 'measurable distance' of the camp.

Since my previous visit to Tchikislar, a large number of Tartars, Armenians, Persians, and other Orientals had established, in the civilian portion of the camp, that in which was the street of wooden shanties, a regular bazaar, got up very much in the fashion of those of their countries.

Large quantities of fruit and vegetables, brought from Lenkoran, or the mouth of the Giurgen, were exposed for sale, and there were many rude booths for the sale of cups of tea, for coffee is a beverage altogether unknown among the general mass of the people in this part of the world. Here is a man entrenched behind several barrels of apples from Lenkoran; there is another whose entire stock-in-trade is a small mountain of pomegranates. This individual, with shaven head and flowing Oriental garments, shrieking in apparent agony, calls attention to his melons; and this other, mourning over the monumental *samovar*, resembling a brass funereal urn, indicates that tea is ready on his scanty premises. A Russian tailor from Baku has set up his establishment in front, and a vendor of earthen teapots from Petrovsk has flooded the ground around him with some hundreds of the articles which he recommends. I call this the bazaar in contradistinction to the main street, or 'Prospect,' as it was already dubbed by the soldiers, where the more imposing wooden edifices of the Armenian spirit and grocery sellers were established. A photographer, too, had been added to the commercial ranks, and no less than two watchmakers had opened their booths. It was a most incongruous mixture of Eastern and Western physiognomies, dresses, and commodities; and as an incarnation of the whole I once noticed a Turcoman, in genuine nomad attire, his enormous sheep-skin hat overshadowing the remainder of his person, sabre at side and poniard in sheath, promenading the 'Prospect' with a Parisian-made silk umbrella under his arm. From the manner in which he carried his new acquisition, he evidently felt that it added no inconsiderable weight to whatever dignity he might have previously laid claim.

Among the incidents which varied the general monotony of our lives at Tchikislar were occasional alarms which

occurred by reason of small bodies of Tekké horsemen venturing into close proximity with the camp. One evening, about ten o'clock, as I sat writing in my *kibitka*, I noticed an unusual stir in the neighbourhood of the cavalry quarters. There was a din of arms and 'mounting in hot haste.' Hurrying to head-quarters, I was told that scouts had arrived, announcing the presence of a considerable body of the enemy not far from us. A regiment of Kabardian horse was ordered out to reconnoitre. General Prince Wittgenstein took command of the reconnaissance. I got my horse saddled as quickly as might be, and overtook the party a short distance from the camp. The night was very dark, but as the sandy expanse which reaches inland for some miles from the edge of the Caspian was perfectly level, the darkness was of no great consequence, so far as riding was concerned. We rode five or six miles, sending out scouts in every direction, but no trace of the enemy could be perceived. The entire night was occupied in this fashion, and dawn was just breaking as, sitting upon our *bourkas*, or hairy mantles, we partook of an impromptu breakfast which the general had had the foresight to bring with him. Whether this was a real alarm, or only one of those manœuvres often practised in order to keep the troops continually on the alert, and accustom them to unforeseen contingencies, I cannot say, but they occurred with sufficient frequency.

I cannot better conclude the chapter of accidents at Tchikislar than by mentioning an odd incident which befell me there. Among the many singular inhabitants of the place were two who merit special notice. These were a moderate-sized, ordinary-looking pig, and a very common-looking white dog, with a suspicion of the cur about him. The two were intimate friends, and early each morning set out together to scour the camp in company, calling in turn, in the most intelligent manner, at each tent door, the pig

grunting, the dog barking, to call the attention of the inmates to their presence. In this way they systematically made the round of the camp, the dog evidently considering himself as having charge of his stouter comrade, and seeming to direct the movements of the party; and when evening approached it was evidently he who induced the pig to return to his home. The latter frequently objected to this, and manifested a desire to prolong his strolls into the darker hours, but his companion, taking him by the ears with his teeth, conducted him, notwithstanding his remonstrances, in the direction of his residence. One very sultry day, I was lying upon my carpet on the shady side of my *kibitka*, trying to write, and smoking a briar-root pipe of somewhat large proportions. With the view of completing a sentence, I took the pipe from my mouth, and laid it upon the sand just outside the edge of my carpet, to avoid the risk of burning the latter. For a few minutes I was entirely absorbed in my writing, but I was roused by a crunching sound beside me, and, turning hastily, perceived my acquaintance the pig, with my briar-root pipe in his mouth —not in the act of smoking, but of eating it. He had already eaten the greater portion of the head, tobacco included, and when I attempted to recover my outraged property he made away across the camp, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I succeeded in recovering its shattered remains. I keep them still, as a souvenir of the peculiarities of Eastern Caspian pigs.

During the three long months that I remained in Tchikislar, waiting in vain in the hope that a move in some direction would be made, I had many interesting conversations with Russian officers on the aspirations of Russia in that part of the world, and, to do them justice, I must say that those aspirations were expressed in the frankest and most undisguised manner. To doubt for a moment that

the Atterek, along its entire length from its mouth to its source, was the recognised boundary between Persia and Russia, was to proclaim an open heresy; and I heard one general officer express his regret that Asterabad had ever been given back to Persia. He was drawing a vivid picture of the difference between the situation where we camped for the moment among the shady woods beyond the Giurgen, and our then position upon these bleak and desolate sands. I believe that the general feeling in the Russian armies which perambulate this portion of the Empire is that Russia was too generous by half in restoring that precious slice of territory which includes Resht and the old capital of the Kadjars, and which they held a little over a century ago, and that they may consider themselves extremely moderate in confining themselves to everything that lies north of the great mountain range reaching away towards Meshed.

Though I had seen the Atterek along its length from Bouyun Bache to Chatte, I had not yet had an opportunity of visiting its delta, of which I had heard a great deal, and I took advantage of the departure of a hunting party proceeding in that direction—organised by Prince Wittgenstein, a gentleman to whom I am indebted for a hundred kindnesses—to explore the swamps bordering on the Caspian. We started at three o'clock in the afternoon, when the intense heat had somewhat diminished, and took our way along the shore for a couple of miles, then turning inland in a south-easterly direction. For three hours our path lay across the sandy waste, here and there being half-dried rainpools; for, strange to say, we had had two or three very heavy showers, a most unusual thing at the time of year. The plain is but a few inches above the sea level, and at a distance of three miles inland we had sometimes to wade half a mile across great shallow expanses of sea-water carried forward by a slight gale. The water at its greatest depth did not

reach mid-leg on our horses, and was alive with vast quantities of a large white carp, known by the Persian name of *Sefid Mahee*, or white fish. The water was evaporating, rapidly leaving the sand at its borders thickly incrusted with salt, and strewn with thousands of stranded fish. Even still further inland we saw these fish putrefying on the sand. After four hours' ride we came upon the first traces of the Atterek. Thick bent-grass grew in abundance in and beside wide shallow channels, at the time entirely dry. Occasionally we had to force our way through dense brakes of bamboo-like reed, nine or ten feet high. Farther on was a large sand ridge, one side apparently scarped by human labour, and crowned by a Turcoman burying-ground. Our destination that evening was an advanced Russian camp, one of the connecting links between Tchikislar and the open of the Atterek delta. We had evidently missed our way, so throwing out a party of Cossacks to reconnoitre the ground, we halted in the cemetery, which commanded an extensive view over the plain. Night was rapidly falling, and as we had little hope of recovering the lost track before morning, we preferred to pass the night where we were. In the midst of the little plateau crowning the eminence on which we stood were two *turbés*, tombs of local saints. They were simply circular roofless structures of unbaked brick, some twenty feet in diameter and twelve in height. In the inner surface of the wall were half a dozen rude niches, meant to contain votive offerings. In the centre of each structure was a kind of altar-tomb, about three feet in height by eight in length. On this was placed the skull of the wild desert sheep, with its enormous circularly curled horns. The skull of this animal is a usual sepulchral ornament among the Turcomans. The ordinary tombs of the cemetery were such as I shall have occasion to describe in recounting my experiences

at the village of Hassan Kouli—wooden poles, old boxes, and articles of household use. Here and there a scraggy bush growing beside a grave was covered with fragments of rag attached to its branches, pieces of broken porcelain and earthenware being scattered round its base. To enable our scouts to find their way back to us we lighted a large fire of old boxes and poles, which were lying about on the highest part of the plateau. No sooner did the light appear than we were assailed by myriads of gigantic mosquitoes, attracted by the blaze. They were the worst of their kind I had ever met with. We were stung even through the linen tunics and trousers we wore, and in five minutes our hands and faces were masses of tumefied bites. My left eye was completely closed. The horses, too, suffered terribly, one of mine becoming altogether disabled for several days afterwards. We had to retire a long way from the fire before any peace could be obtained. I believe that a serious attack of these insects would prove fatal to any ordinary animal.

It was past eleven at night before the shrill, far-reaching cries uttered by the Cossack escort met with any response. Then away across the plain came similar sounds in reply, and soon afterwards we saw a star-like signal light, far, far away. An hour's ride brought us to it. It was a large lantern borne on the top of a pole by a mounted man, and was visible for miles away above the undulations of the plain. We had reached our halting-place for the night —Bouyun Bache—a scattered camp of two hundred men on the borders of a lake-like expanse of water. This latter, I was told, was a rainpool, but its great size and depth, together with the fact of its being bordered by dense growths of cane and bush, induced me to believe it permanent. All around are channels, some natural, others probably irrigation canals, and the lake is probably only

for the moment insulated, being, as I believe, part of the irregular system of watercourses by which the Atterek reaches the sea across its wide flat delta in the rainy season. Next day we retraced our steps towards the cemetery, and after a couple of hours' journey, always in a south-easterly direction, arrived at the *aoull*, or village, of Gouili, consisting of over four hundred *kibitkas*, concentrated in two distinct groups. Here for the first time I saw a channel containing water proceeding from the Atterek, and actually attaining the sea near the southern borders of the Hassan Kouli lagoon. It was impossible to say whether it was natural or artificial, probably it was the latter, for in seasons of great drought a stream of water is turned and returned, divided and subdivided, for irrigation purposes, or to supply cattle. The small populations of adjacent villages often quarrel and fight about the right to turn a stream. With the exception of the shallow expanse of water just mentioned, this channel supplying the village of Gouili was, at that season, the most northerly vestige of the Atterek close to the coast. The Turcomans state that during the winter the other dry beds crossed by us on our way from Tchikislar were plentifully supplied with water. The supply at the village was scant and bad. The stream, if I may so designate such a meandering line of foul water, with no apparent current, had an average width of from twelve to fifteen feet, and was nowhere over knee deep. Its bed was slimy and noisome; for under the first shallow layer of marl was a bed of blue-black sandy earth, which, owing to the frequent wading of camels, horses, and other animals, had been stirred up and mingled with the water. This latter was also impregnated with decaying animal and vegetable products proceeding from the marshes higher up, and smelt strongly of sulphuretted hydrogen. Besides, the domestic animals of the village, goats, sheep, cows, and

dogs, stood or wallowed in the water all day long; and with a strange disregard for hygienic principles, the washing of the community was carried on in it above the village. Close to the edge of the channel, deep narrow pits were excavated in the black ooze, into which filtered the water for human consumption. Only the upper portions of the liquid in these receptacles is drinkable, that lower down being black as ink. It seems odd that under these circumstances, and in view of the vast marshes around, fever should not be prevalent. On the contrary, the population of both sexes, and of all ages, looked healthy and well developed. Enormous mosquitoes abounded in immense quantities. After a night spent in a tent pitched on the border of the stream, both my eyes were almost completely closed, and my face was quite unrecognisable. The natives protect themselves against these insects by keeping a wood fire continually smouldering in the centre of the *kibitka*. The air is thus filled with acrid wood smoke, which expels the enemy. I have tried this remedy, but found it as bad as the evil it was meant to counteract. It was a question of choosing between having one's face and hands stung all over by the insects, and being semi-asphyxiated and having one's eyes inflamed by the smoke. Large horse-flies, too, abound, which inflict cruel torture on the larger quadrupeds. I had one of my horses completely disabled by the multitude of inflamed pustules resulting from the stings of the flies. After a miserable night at the village of Gouili, our whole party rode out into the vast marshes in which at this season the Atterek loses itself, only such tiny streamlets as I have described finding their way to the lagoon. For a couple of miles we followed the winding course of the stream, which in some places was deep and narrow, so narrow that sometimes it was quite hidden from view by the tamarisk bushes growing on either bank. The thick,

muddy waters were alive with fish, so crowded as to be incapable of moving save by floundering and jumping over one another. They were chiefly, as is always the case in these waters, the *sefid mahee*, or large white carp. As we occasionally crossed the stream, our horses trod them to death by scores. In less crowded nooks huge pike were to be seen lurking under the bushes, but so stupefied by the foul water that the Cossacks took them in numbers by striking them with the point of the sabre, or simply whisking them out of the water by the tail. Owing to the condition of the fish, however, it was deemed inadvisable to use them as food. A coarse sedge-like grass grew luxuriantly everywhere, and here and there were small cleared spaces on which wretchedly thin oats and barley, or some other such cereal, was cultivated. There were extensive tracts of cucumber and water melon (*karpus*). Indeed, this latter crop is the only one worthy of mention, for the corn and maize were very limited indeed. Here and there were raised platforms, where men kept continual watch over the fields and herds; for the Tekké and Goklan marauders very frequently swept away the cattle and burned the corn of their more peaceable Yamud brethren, the banks of the Atterek constituting a direct and well-watered route to the coast villages. Everywhere among the straggling fields were to be seen the tombs of the warriors who had fallen from time to time in such raids. A few partridges and quails occasionally sprang up from among the corn patches. These our Turcoman guides ran down on horseback, the birds generally flying but fifty yards, and then taking to the stubble and bushes. Throughout the entire day's exploration we did not meet with a single genuine branch of the Atterek, the few trenches of liquid mud we crossed being irrigation channels draining the neighbouring swamps.

On the following day we pushed our investigations several miles further to the east, towards the head of the swampy delta. We crossed hundreds of acres of marshy ground, covered with bulrushes which overtopped a horseman's head, the horses sinking fetlock deep in the mixture of mud and tangled grass beneath our feet. Here and there broad belts of bamboo-like cane, growing from fifteen to eighteen feet high, and entirely impassable, forced us to turn aside. In the midst of these cane brakes were shallow pools crammed with fish, more than one-half of which were dead and putrescent. The air reeked with the effluvia of decomposing animal and vegetable matter. Vast flocks of water-fowl rose screaming from these pools as we approached. There were blue herons, swans, cormorants, flamingoes, frigate-birds, and even eagles and hawks together. Occasionally, too, a sudden plunge and crashing amid the cane announced the presence of a wild boar, and the animal would break out into the open and dash across the swamp. Sometimes a pair, accompanied by four or five half-grown young, would make their appearance. It was difficult work galloping after them over the marshy ground, where our horses often sank knee deep in miry spots; but we generally brought them to bay after a run of a mile or so, usually in some water pool thickly fringed with bushes. Here they were literally riddled by the carbine bullets of the Cossacks and Turcomans. We succeeded in capturing alive two young boars. They were well grown, and their olive, dun-coloured bodies striped longitudinally with black. This striping disappears as the animals grow older. Very large numbers of these boars are annually destroyed by the Turcomans, to prevent their ravaging the rice, corn, and melon plantations. They are never chased for food, the inhabitants being all Sunnite Mahometans.

After having thoroughly explored the swampy delta of the Atterek, and compared my own observations with those of others, I am convinced that during three-quarters of the year nothing worthy the name of a river comes within ten miles of the coast, the water being entirely absorbed by irrigation trenches or by the great spongy surface of the marsh. This latter, to judge from its condition during the hottest months of the year, must in winter and spring be inundated and entirely impassable. Nothing in the shape of a large principal channel through the delta exists, and very considerable engineering works would be necessary to render possible the passage of the smallest launch from the sea. The existence of this swamp, thirty miles long and twenty in breadth, gives rise to a good deal of uncertainty about the exact position of the frontier. Though the Atterek was at the time the real Russo-Persian frontier, diplomatically at least, the river Giurgen, further south, seemed to be the practical boundary, and has been mentioned by some authors as the frontier. The Russian authorities, however, state that they have no claim whatever on the Giurgen. The Persian military station nearest the line of demarcation is the Fort of Ak-Kala, situated on the Giurgen River.

For some reason or other, the question of slavery among the Turcomans, which had from time immemorial remained untouched, was attracting considerable attention. The new Persian Governor of Asterabad had issued the strictest orders that the Turcoman tribes acknowledging the authority of the Shah, whether on Persian soil or residing for the moment on Russian territory, were instantly to give up all captives held by them as slaves. A short time before, in the village of Tchikislar, a curious case occurred. A Persian woman, of good family, had been carried off from her home during a predatory Turcoman expedition, and

was retained as a slave. Her parents, learning where she was, came to Tchikislar with a view of ransoming her; but her owner refused to part with her at any price, stating that she was now his wife. The case was referred to General Lazareff, who decided that, were the woman simply retained as a slave, she should be at once given up without ransom; but should it be proved that she were married to the Turcoman, she should remain with her husband. The lady herself intimated her desire to return to Persia; but, as her husband was able to prove the marriage, she was obliged to stay at Tchikislar. Upon this decision she became very violent, and physical force had to be appealed to to get her out of the General's tent and to her husband's *kibitka*.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HASSAN-KOULI—DEATH OF LAZAREFF.

Hassan-Kouli lagoon—Incursions of sea-water—Old piratical station—Buried melons—Turcoman cemetery—Subsidence of graves—Ioyunvuskha—Courtesy of the desert—Turcoman character—Battle tombs—Turco-Celtic derivations—Open-air mosques—An ex-corsair—Bad treatment of an envoy—A Turcoman interior—A native dinner—Polite attentions—Armenian fishing-station—Deserted camel—Thirsty sheep—Khirgese and Turcomans—Dysentery at Tchikislar—Lazareff's illness and death—A burial at sea—A stormy voyage—General Tergukasoff—Back to Tchikislar and Chatte—Rainpools in the desert—Failing camels—Commissariat errors—Water-pits.

HASSAN-KOULI is a genuine Yamud Turcoman village standing upon a sand-spit bounding the north of the lagoon of the same name—the lagoon into which the river Atterek falls. It is situated about fifteen versts from the camp of Tchikislar, and is at present the point where the new Russo-Persian frontier commences.

The road to Hassan-Kouli (or rather Hassan-Ghouli) lies along the flat sandy beach stretching south from Tchikislar, and is fringed on the land side by low sand hills, slightly sprinkled with parched shrubs and sedge-like grass. So level is the beach, and so gradual the slope of the sea bottom, that the least gale of wind from the west is sufficient to drive the water five hundred yards inland, and I have known the westerly storm known as the *tenkis* to force the water as much as three miles over the plains. A short time previous to my leaving the camp at Tchikislar we were completely inundated by one of these invasions of

sea-water, and the cavalry camp was forced back several hundred yards. Southward of the Russian camp is a straggling collection of *kibitkas*, or circular Turcoman huts, the remnants of what was once a great piratical station, and which served as an emporium for the reception of Persians captured on the southern Caspian coast previously to their being transmitted to Khiva and Bokhara. A few years ago it was bombarded by the Russian war steamers; since when the place has become one of little importance—a mere fishing village—and just now the main occupation of the inhabitants is that of catering for the Russian camp. A few hundred yards beyond its limits, the eye is struck by a series of black objects sticking up from the ground and crowning the sand hills. On approaching what at a distance might easily pass for men mounting guard, one finds a number of sticks, or leg bones of camels planted upright in the sand, and swathed in pieces of the rude brown felt used for the roofing of *kibitkas*. The Turcomans explained to me, in their peculiar Yamud idiom, that something was buried under these effigies, and as at the time I could only understand one out of every three words they uttered, I at first came to the conclusion that they were sepulchral monuments, and that the tract covered by them was a cemetery. Later on I discovered that the buried objects were melons and cucumbers, which are placed in covered trenches, not only to preserve them from the crows, but also to prevent the sun from acting upon them. In a Turcoman house there is little room but for the members of the family and their immediate household necessaries. Such a thing as a storehouse is unknown. Hence this melon cemetery.

The entire road, if road I can call the track along the beach, is desolate in the extreme. During the whole traject I met with no living things save an enormous black

eagle, preying on the fish stranded by the gale, and a few shrill-voiced seamews. Within four miles of the village I came upon the cemetery, which serves alike for Hassan-Kouli and Tchikislar. It is situated among some sand hills rather higher than those around. On approaching, one is struck by the appearance of a vast number of poles, precisely similar to telegraph supports. These are the ordinary sepulchral monuments, stone being entirely unknown in the district. At the moment of burial a couple of linen bands or a few morsels of cloth are attached to the pole, and at the time of my visit many such were fluttering in the wind. From the frequent occurrence of fixed pulleys in the tops of these poles I presume they are the masts of the fishing smacks of those buried, for the entire population of the Caspian borders is a fishing one. There are exceptions to these pole tombs. In some cases one sees a free-stone slab rudely sculptured into a resemblance of a Turcoman hat, and bearing a brief inscription in Turkish character. Instead of the verse from the Koran seen on Turkish and Persian tombs, there is simply the name of the deceased and the year in which he died. In some instances the names of the ancestors for three or four generations are written. I recollect one: 'Ali, son of Hassan, and grandson of Hussein, died 1272' (Hegira). These stone tombs are brought from Persia.

After the poles, articles of household use are the most frequent memorials. Earthen tea-pots and large water pitchers frequently stand at the head of the grave, and in many cases the money or clothes box of the defunct serves as his monument in death. These boxes are of the size of an ordinary travelling portmanteau, covered with thin brass sheetings, and strongly bound with iron. In the case of children, women, or very poor persons, the sole memento is usually a small circle of stones, or rather fragments of a

friable conglomerate of minute sea shells. At the southern extremity of the burying-ground stands a small wooden house with pointed, sloping roof, surrounded by a shallow trench. Close by are two poles, one very high, the other less tall, and bearing on its summit a vane or weathercock. It is singular that even here a cock should be associated with this contrivance, for on the top of the pole bearing the weather-vane is a rude representation of the bird. The small wooden house, evidently constructed with the planking of old fishing boats, is a kind of funeral chapel, where the moullah recites some verses of the Koran on the occasion of each interment. Sometimes, too, a rich and charitably disposed inhabitant of the district presents a sheep or goat to be cut up and distributed to the poor at this spot. The dead must be buried in very large coffins, the sand over many of the graves having fallen in to a depth of three or four feet. My attention was forcibly called to this by one incident. An officer of dragoons who accompanied me was engaged in sketching some tombs. He was on horseback. All at once I noticed his horse's hind legs gradually sinking in the sand, and presently the fore-feet also—and then, suddenly, before the rider had time to dismount, there was a crash, and horse and man were half hidden in a cloud of sand and dust. The horse had been standing on a grave. A somewhat similar accident happened to myself once in Armenia, when, unconsciously riding over one of the semi-subterranean dwellings of the inhabitants, my horse's legs went through the roof. There seems little or nothing about these tombs in common with those of the kindred Tartar races dwelling west of the Caspian. Between Baku and Shumakha the Mussulman inhabitants invariably place at the head of the grave a representation of a lance-head sculptured in stone, about eighteen inches high. Half-way

between the cemetery and Hassan-Kouli is a singular structure, devoted to an equally singular usage. It is a small, flat-topped mound, twelve or fifteen feet high, surmounted by a pole. When a man dies in battle he is interred, if possible, on the spot where he falls, and in his clothes. If he die of old age or sickness he is carried to the cemetery, and his clothes are hung on the pole surmounting the mound just mentioned. Several times during the year his friends or relations come to brush and clean the garments, and sometimes bring presents of new ones. This institution is named *Ioyunvuskha.*

Between the cemetery and the village or town of Hassan-Kouli extends one vast desert plain of sand and salt. Columns of sand borne by whirlwinds dance to and fro, and a kind of sand fog fills the air, making objects invisible beyond four hundred yards. This sand and salt dust, filling the eyes, is excessively disagreeable. Arrived in the midst of this plain our guide, a Yamud Turcoman in the Russian service, found an object on which to exercise the courtesy of the desert. It was an ass of moderate dimensions, who evidently, from his pack-saddle and trailing rope, had broken loose. The Turcoman went in pursuit, and the runaway fully justified his character as 'a strong wild ass of the desert,' for it was a quarter of an hour before the long-legged horse could turn him. For over three miles the Turcoman perseveringly drove the beast before him, ultimately to the owner, to whom he handed him. When asked whether the latter had given him anything for his trouble, he answered, 'He said thank you, that was enough; another time, perhaps, he would do as much for me.' And yet this Turcoman, with his grenadier guard's hat, curved scimitar, and slung rifle, was a person I should certainly eye askance did I meet him in another part of the world in a lonesome locality. These

Turcomans have a strangely mixed character. I believe their natural tendencies to be very good, and their mental capacity of no mean order. Under a fixed and firm rule, I believe they would develop into excellent citizens and invaluable soldiers. As it is, they show a remarkable capacity for self-government, and obey their elected village chiefs as regularly as French or English constituencies concur in the decisions of their Mayors. Their predatory and lawless manners towards neighbouring peoples are the result of unhappy circumstances, like those which created similar manners and customs in the days of our feudal ancestors. I speak now of the Yamud Turcomans, and not of their neighbours the Tekké.

Drawing near the village, we passed a number of battle-tombs, melancholy records of the sad state of affairs existing between the different branches of a common race. The Tekké Turcomans, who, according to all accounts, were a set of irreclaimable scamps, passed their leisure time in making raids on their neighbours. When victorious, they killed the entire male adult population, and carried off the women and children as slaves. The attacked village naturally did its best to repel the invaders, every able-bodied man turning out at once in defence of life and home. A curious distinction in the system of sepulture of those killed in battle and those dying in their beds existed. As I have already stated, the individual dying a natural death was carried to the cemetery, and his clothes were hung up on the *Ioyun-ruskha*. But the man who fell in battle was buried in his clothes, when possible on the very spot where he fell. The outskirts of the village of Hassan-Kouli are full of the sepulchral indications of violent death. The soldier's tomb consists of a pole of some twenty feet in length, planted vertically in the sand, its base surrounded by a circle of small stones, within which are accumulated a selection of

water jars and earthen tea-pots, tributes to the memory of the departed. Sometimes a morsel of linen, or a piece of rudely-embroidered felt, hangs standardwise from the pole. The entire sand plain in front of the village was studded with these battle records, some dating only a few months back. There were no outskirts to the village. The Tekké people were too frequent visitors to allow of the luxury of suburban residences. There is nothing known to Western Europeans to which I could compare a Turcoman village, save, perhaps, those collections of beehives one sees along the Spanish shore of the Bidassoa. A *kibitka* is exactly like an enormous beehive, and one is exactly like another. They are in reed and felt what the 'beehive houses' in stone are in the remnants of ancient Celtic architecture. *A propos* of Turcomans and Celts, there seems a curious resemblance between the name of the individual from which that of the village is taken, and a similar patronymic at home. Hassan-Kouli (Ghouli) means 'the servant of Hassan,' just as Easterns style themselves 'servant of God,' 'of Mohammed,' or 'of Ali,' that is, according to some authorities. Some say the 'Ghouli' means 'a lake.' In Scotland we have the word gillie—a servant; and in Ireland the name 'Giola Patrick,' i.e., 'the servant of St. Patrick.' I do not know what philologists will say to this. My attention was drawn to it by the wonderful resemblance of the inhabitants to those of the west of Ireland. The physiognomy is the same, and the military attitude and humoristic tendencies of both races are strikingly similar. The independent clan organisation and the elective system of choosing the chief form other points of resemblance, and the nomadic shepherd life is similar to that of the early inhabitants of the Celtic districts of the British Isles.

Hassan-Kouli, which consists of eight or nine hundred *kibitkas*, termed *aladjaks* by the nomads of the more easterly

plains, is almost exclusively a fishing station inhabited by Turcomans of the Jaffar Bay (or Bey) tribe. It is established along the sand, raised but a few inches above the water level. The slightest breeze in a certain direction is sufficient to impel the shallow waters of the lagoon into the very midst of the village. The *kibitkas* are consequently established on slightly raised platforms of beaten earth, to prevent their floors being inundated, and a few wooden structures, among them that of the chief, are built on stout wooden piles three or four feet high. In front of each dwelling is a raised platform eight or ten feet above the ground, sometimes covered by a thatch awning. These platforms are used for drying fish and the skins of sea-birds, which are largely exported to Persia. The *djami*, or mosque, is of the most simple and primitive kind. It is an oblong platform of beaten earth twenty-five feet by twelve, encompassed by a shallow trench, and elevated some fifteen inches above the surrounding surface. On each side a broad plank, thrown across the ditch, gives access to the platform. The *muezzim* takes his stand in some open space close by, and putting his hands to each side of his mouth utters the long-drawn call to prayer at the appointed hours. I noticed several similar praying stations in different parts of the village, one being evidently quite inadequate to accommodate all the inhabitants. In no Turcoman village did I observe any covered structure devoted to religious worship. The nomad habits of the people entirely preclude the possibility of making use of the domed and minareted structures of more sedentary Mussulmans. Apart from the catching and drying of *sefid mahee*, or the white fish, the place has no industry save the manufacture of *kibitkas*. This latter seems to flourish; but whether its products are confined to renewing the local residences or whether they are manufactured for neighbouring commu-

nities I was unable to ascertain. Previous to the year 1859, Hassan-Kouli was a centre of piratism. Moullah Dourdi, the now respectable old gentleman and ex-corsair, who, while I was at Tchikislar, was one of the principal local commissariat contractors, hails from this place. Still there are remnants of the old habit to which the Hassan-Koulians cling lovingly; and along the wild unorganised Persian frontier the subjects of His Majesty Nasr Eddin Shah have yet cause to fear the nomads of the borders. Even after the suppression of open piracy on the high seas, raids on Persian coast villages and the retention of the principal inhabitants for ransom continued; and unredeemed Persian captives of the female sex are still to be found at Hassan-Kouli, though no longer, it is true, as mere captives; they have become the wives of Turcomans, and Persian blood is frequently seen indicated by the dark eyes, high arched brows, and feminine features of the younger inhabitants.

I have already alluded to the case of the Persian lady, held captive at Hassan Kouli, whose place of seclusion was discovered, and who was reclaimed by her relations, armed violence being the result when the Russian emissary was sent to recover her. Cases like this are extremely rare, for the female Persian captives have become quite naturalized among the Turcomans, and, for the most part do not wish to leave their children and newly adopted homes. It is much to be wondered at that, during the long years previous to the occupation of Ashuradé Bay by the Russian flotilla, the Persian government took no measures to suppress the man-stealing traffic of the Yamuds. A very insignificant naval force indeed, on the part of Russia, has been found quite adequate to the task. Two or three of the tiniest steam gun-boats launched from Enzeli by the Shah, coupled with the smallest organisation of police along the

South Caspian littoral, would have effectually put an end to the traffic. Nasr Eddin Shah, however he may fret about the gradual advance of Russia along both eastern and southern coasts, must feel under obligations to her for the prompt manner in which his subjects have been freed from the ravages of the Turcoman pirates. How far this action on the part of Russia has been completely disinterested it is hard to say; but it would be most ungracious to take it for granted that humanitarian motives were absent, and that she sought only a plausible excuse for converting the Caspian into what it now is, a Muscovite lake. Since the action of Lieutenant Sideroff in running down the pirate luggers, and for which he was decorated by the Shah, things have changed immensely for the better all round the coast. Turcoman hostility on the Persian sea-board may be said to have totally ceased, and, as a consequence, maritime activity has greatly increased in the small villages which were previously nothing but the fortalices of a few fishermen. Even the most active among the Turcoman slave dealers themselves, like Moullah Dourdi, have become converted into commissariat agents and general merchants.

The chief of Hassan-Kouli was absent—in fact he had passed us on the road from Tchikislar; but in our capacity of distinguished foreigners we were conducted to his house. It was not a *kibitka*, but a square edifice, constructed of the planks of used-up fishing boats, oblong in form, with high and pitched pointed roof, and set upon piles. A flight of half-a-dozen wooden steps led to the door. The main chamber might be about twenty feet by twelve, and was lighted on two sides by windows actually containing glass. A homespun carpet of sober but harmoniously blended colours covered the floor, and here and there were felt mats. On some lateral shelves were piles of beds and cushions, and in the windows a couple of ordinary paraffin lamps. Tea

was served, and then the *kalioun*, a rudimentary *nargeelah*, or hubble-bubble pipe in wood, was brought in, and passed round. A running, desultory conversation was started, all matters connected with immediate local politics being studiously avoided. Our acting host was a stout, middle-aged man, with beautifully white teeth, and an excessively humorous twinkle in his clear grey eyes. He wore loose, wide trousers of white calico, and a shirt of the same material, which hung open on his chest. From his general physiognomy he might have passed for a stout Flemish burgher, rather than a citizen of Hassan-Kouli, and doubtless an ex-pirate. My companion was a Russian. That nationality he perfectly understood. My country, he had heard of; but he wanted to know where it was situated. He was, or appeared to be, perfectly satisfied by the explanation that it was very far off; and then he suddenly asked whether the Russo-Turkish war were yet over. I am very much afraid that this child-like *bonhomie* had but little to do with the real character of the man, and was put on especially for our benefit. Hypocrisy is the pride of a true Oriental.

A dinner of boiled mutton and *pilaff* (boiled rice) mixed up in a single mess, was served in a large deep dish of tinned copper, laid on the floor. The entire company sat round, and fished out each a handful. Contrary to ordinary Mussulman habits there was no preparatory washing of hands, and, especially in the case of our acting host, 'the hand that mingled in the meal' might have been more scrupulously clean. Each person boldly grasped a handful of rice, squeezed it into a ball in the palm of his hand, and then clapped it into his mouth by a movement similar to that of a conjuror swallowing a table knife. Our host, who seemed to have taken an especial liking to me, from time to time scraped pieces of mutton off the bones with his dirty thumb-nail, and threw them into my part of the

dish, expressing his wonder at my small appetite for animal food. After dinner there was no more washing than before it. The guests stuck their fingers one after the other into their mouths, thus removing the excess of rice and grease adhering to them. The meal concluded, tea was served again; that all-pervading institution, the *samovar*, being again brought in. As is usual all over this part of the East, the tea was served in porcelain bowls or glass tumblers. It is drunk in prodigious quantities, very weak, over-sweetened, and without milk or cream. In fact, this latter is entirely unknown as an adjunct in all true tea-drinking countries. My attentive host, noticing that half-a-dozen flies were swimming in my tea, immediately plunged two of his great unwashed fingers up to the knuckles into my glass to fish out the intruders, and on each similar and oft-repeated bath on the part of the insects it was only my own prompt action that prevented a repetition of the attention. On his part it was meant in the kindliest possible spirit, and the act was one of genuine politeness. He would have seen all the flies under the dominion of their ruler Beelzebub in his compatriots' glass before he would have taken the same trouble. Here the invariable sequel to a meal is a sleep. Large, soft cushions were brought, and, lying on the carpet, we were soon buried in slumber, overcome by the intense heat. It was three in the afternoon when we took leave of our acting host and turned our horses' heads towards Tchikislar. Far out in the shallow lagoon, a couple of miles from land, we noticed wooden houses—fishing stations, the property, if I do not mistake, of a rich Armenian merchant, who also possessed a vast establishment of a similar kind in the inland waters of the Moredab at Enzeli on Persian territory, and for which he paid an annual fee of 40,000*l.* to the Shah.

Our way back lay through the cemetery and sand hills

again. A convoy of camels, returning from Chatte, had passed since the morning, and, as usual, in their track was a disabled camel, crouched kneelingly on the burning sand. He was munching wearily some withered shrubs, and from time to time swung his great, long, gaunt neck around, to chase the myriad flies that settled on the large bare sore on his side. Only the stump of his tail remained. The rest had, according to the custom of the Khirgese drivers, been cut off as evidence that he had been abandoned in the desert. The poor beast was lying close by a well, whose mouth was protected from the drifting sands by a bottomless tub, and he gazed wistfully at the water beyond his reach. Round the well were some cracked earthen bowls, beside which a few diminutive brown, horned sheep were waiting the chance of a passing traveller who, when watering his horse, might afford them the opportunity of drinking. They crowded imploringly around us, standing on their hind legs, and endeavouring to reach at the cracked earthen vessels from which we were drinking, and into which we had poured the contents of the nosebags of water fished up by our linked horse tethers. It was pitiable to see the number of these disabled camels that one was accustomed to meet in a day's ride. A Khirgese would archly explain the matter by saying that these abandoned camels 'belonged to his Imperial Majesty'—that is, had been hired for the Government service, and become disabled, thus entitling the proprietors to a compensation of one hundred roubles for each. The said proprietors preferred maltreating a weak animal and then abandoning him, the money they received more than recompensing them for the loss. I have already mentioned that condign punishment was meted out to half-a-dozen of these blackguards for having thus cut off the tails of sixty camels which they abandoned on the road from Krasnavodsk to Tchikislar.

These Khirgese seem to me a race far inferior, morally and physically, to their more southerly brethren of the steppes, the Turcomans. It is a curious fact, too, that there exists a wide difference in the horses of these nomad races. Those of the Khirgese are short-legged, shaggy, and fat; those of the Turcomans tall, gaunt, and wiry.

When the charm of novelty wore off, time hung heavily on our hands in the camp at Tchikislar. Notwithstanding all precautions, I fell a victim to the prevailing malady, which was carrying off soldiers by the score. I allude to that curse of ill-regulated camps, dysentery. It is a disease which prostrates one almost immediately. Simultaneously the Commander-in-Chief had a virulent attack of carbuncles, between his shoulders and on his breast and stomach. Only a short time previously the plague had been raging at Astrakan, and there were those who said that the General had incautiously purchased a rug which was tainted with the infection. Be this as it may, he was obliged to keep his bed, just as the critical moment had arrived—the moment for the advance into the Akhal Tekké country. Prince Dolgorouki, commanding the advance guard, had already been for some time to the front. Prince Wittgenstein marched with his cavalry, and had invited me to accompany him, but as I tried to drag myself from my bed to dress I fell prostrate on the floor through sheer weakness. Anyone who has suffered from the same malady will readily recognise the situation. General Lazareff sent an aide-de-camp daily to enquire after me, and I returned the courtesy by despatching my servant to ask how the Commander-in-Chief progressed. Some of the people in the camp said it was a race between us as to which should die first. The supreme moment having come, the General was lifted from his bed into a four-horse vehicle, which was intended to carry him to the front. He reached Chatte, at the junc-

tion of the Atterek and Sumbar rivers, where the carbuncles were operated upon by the chief surgeon of the army. The General insisted upon pushing forward at four in the morning, but before he reached the next station he was dead.

The doctors had told me that to remain at Tchikislar was to incur a more than serious risk of death, and from what I knew of military operations I was aware that before definite hostilities commenced I should have time to recruit my strength in a healthier atmosphere, and amid happier surroundings. On August 22 I staggered from my bed, and was supported to the pier, where a man-of-war's boat was waiting to take me on board the 'Ural' war steamer. I went as the guest of Lieutenant Ungern-Sternberg, the second in command on board, to whose unremitting kindness I am glad to have an opportunity of now bearing witness. He died shortly afterwards. The storms so prevalent on the Caspian at that time of the year doubled the ordinary period of transit to Baku, and we were almost overtaken by the 'Tamar,' screw steamer, conveying the remains of my poor old friend, General Lazareff.

During my voyage from Tchikislar to Baku on board the 'Ural,' which was crowded with barely convalescent patients from the camp, most of them, if not all, suffering from dysentery, I had an opportunity of witnessing a burial at sea. An infirmary sergeant, ill with the prevailing disease, had postponed his departure to the last moment, and died after the first twenty-four hours at sea, probably in consequence of the exhaustion incident to sea-sickness acting upon an utterly debilitated frame. His body, sewn in a hammock, lay beside the gunwale, partly covered by the Red Cross Geneva flag. Close by the head of the corpse was a lectern, on which lay a Russian missal. One by one the comrades of the deceased approached the lectern,

and read over in silence some passages or prayers devoted to the memory of the dead. Lieutenant Woltchakoff, an officer of the war steamer, was among those who read longest and most earnestly to the memory of his departed comrade-in-arms. In the afternoon all the officers of the ship appeared in full uniform. The great bulk of the invalids, soldiers from the interior of Russia, many of whom had seldom seen any expanse of water larger than a river or a lake, were horrified when they understood that their dead companion was about to be committed to the waves. They grumbled, and said it was scarcely worth their while to run so many risks and suffer such great privations, to be treated in such a fashion when they died. As the final hour approached, the small sacred picture which garnishes the cabin of every Russian vessel was brought on deck. The body was elevated on the shoulders of four seamen, and a procession, with lighted candles, was formed, the boatswain, bearing the holy picture, leading. The entire circuit of the deck was made. The corpse was then deposited alongside the opening of the bulwarks, some iron weights were attached to the feet, the Geneva flag was run up to the peak, and a twelve-pounder gun, ready charged, was run out close by. The whole ship's company uncovered. The body was slipped along a plank, and as it sank beneath the waters the gun boomed out a farewell to one of the many victims of the Akhal Tekké expedition. The grumblers at once took heart. Those who had felt so irritated at the prospect of being thrown overboard like dead dogs when they died, now thought how fine a thing it was for officers in full dress to stand by bareheaded while a cannon was discharged in honour of their deceased companion—a greater honour than any of them could hope for in life. Immediately after the interment a violent storm arose, the engines, working full speed, barely enabling the 'Ural' to

hold her own against the furious winds from the west. We were kept two days thus stationary, and were then obliged to run towards Krasnavodsk and anchor under shelter of the island of Ogurchen until the storm abated. Then, having run short of *astatki* fuel, we were obliged to go to Krasnavodsk to take some in. Thence we went straight across to Baku, which we made at 7.30 on the morning of August 29. Two days afterwards the body of Lazareff arrived on board the 'Tamar,' enclosed in a rough coffin of blackened deal. A day was occupied in the embalming, and it was then carried in procession to the Gregorian Church in the great square, borne on the shoulders of the deceased veteran's compatriots. His decorations, each one borne upon a cushion by an officer, were carried in front. There was no military music, but priests and acolytes chanted. From the chapel the body was conveyed direct to Tiflis, where it was interred with military honours.

On September 17, General Tergukasoff, the new Commander-in-Chief of the expedition, together with General Gourchine, arrived at Baku; and on the 20th I accompanied them to Tchikislar. Almost immediately on landing the Generals repaired to Chatte, and thence to the extreme advance at Bendessen, among the Kopet-Dagh mountains, in order to ascertain how matters stood after the repulse of the troops from before Yengi Sheher. Tergukasoff would not afford me any facilities for accompanying him, and as, without relays of horses, I could not pretend to keep up with his party, I was obliged to go towards the front with a battalion which was escorting some baggage waggons to Chatte. The march occupied seven days, and as I have already given the diary, describing the bed of the Atterek, which I kept on the occasion, I need not now recur to it. I was not allowed to proceed any further than

Chatte, and, after a stay of three days there, it was intimated to me by the Chief of Staff, on the part of General Tergukasoff, who had just arrived from Dusolum, that I was desired to return to Tchikislar, in company with two battalions which were about to retire upon the same place. Operations were at an end for the winter, and nothing of any interest would transpire for some months. I therefore packed up, and started on my return journey. The two battalions, unencumbered by waggons, took the direct road by Karaja-Batur, where water-pits had been constructed for the accommodation of the troops. We arrived in Tchikislar after a march of four days and a half. Rain had been falling plentifully, and great pools of water were met with from time to time, along the borders and over the surfaces of which immense numbers of waterfowl were to be seen. In some of the more accidented ground, a tender young grass imparted an emerald tint to the spot, though it was of such a very slight and sparse nature indeed as to be practically useless for grazing purposes. Still, it shows what the so-called desert could become under happier circumstances, and with a constant water supply.

The entire route from Chatte to Tchikislar was strewn with camel and mule bones, and I several times witnessed the exhausted condition of the camels who had come from the front. Scarcely a day's march was ever got through without half a dozen falling from weakness, and being obliged to be abandoned. The camel will continue to stalk along under his burden in the string to which he belongs, showing no apparent signs of exhaustion, and will suddenly fall as if shot through the head. In the greater number of cases in which a camel thus falls, he dies in a few hours, on the same spot; in some instances, however, he recovers slowly, regains his legs, and is able to graze. Such a camel, however, is altogether useless afterwards, and abandoned camels

are constantly to be met with, straying at will over the desert.

I found that many battalions had been sent back from Tchikislar to Baku and Petrovsk, and that it was intended that a limited number should remain in the camp. General Tergukasoff had evidently made up his mind to avoid the very serious error committed by his predecessor. Lazareff had brought his entire force to Tchikislar, and had then endeavoured to accumulate the reserve of provisions which was indispensable before commencing active operations. It was much more expensive east of the Caspian to feed the soldiers than if they had remained on its western shore. The place was much more unhealthy, and the amount daily consumed by the troops left but a small margin to spare of the provisions which were constantly being disembarked at the camp. Some sanitary measures were also adopted by the new generalissimo, great attention being paid to the construction of new water-pits. These were some eight to ten feet in depth, and the same in width at top. After a few hours some bucketsful of water collected in the bottoms, but it was at best of a brackish kind, and in a day or so became quite undrinkable owing to the concentration of saline matter due to evaporation by the sun's heat. Insect deposits and vegetable growths also helped to render the water unfit for consumption, so that it was necessary to be continually constructing new water-pits. The entire neighbourhood of the camp, far and near, was honeycombed with these holes. General Lazareff had entertained an idea of digging a small canal from the Atterek to the camp, and, bad though the water of that river is, such a supply would have been an inestimable boon.

The time was fast approaching when I should once more turn my back on Tchikislar. Time passed drearily enough; for when once the denizens of the camp had settled down to

the routine of every-day work, and we had organised our separate *ménages*, there was a sad lack of excitement and novelty. All day long an ant-like procession of soldiers streamed from the pier to the depôts, each man bearing on his back sacks of corn which the Turcoman launches had landed from the transport ships. It was but a short time before my departure that the tramway along the reconstructed pier, and reaching to the back of the camp, was in working order. As the sun went down the wailing chant of the evening prayer, accompanied by bugles and drums, broke the general stillness that accompanied the parade. When darkness settled over the camp, *ombres chinoises* flitted on the canvas walls of the lighted tents; and from far and near came the confused beating of drums and clashing of cymbals, keeping time to the melancholy dirge of the soldiers' choruses, for all their songs seem essentially sad. Then, as midnight drew near, nought was heard save the low surging and fretting of the Caspian surf, and the shriek of the owl and the night-hawk in answer to the plaintive cry of the prowling jackals.

## CHAPTER IX.

### FROM TCHIKISLAR TO ASTERABAD.

Banished from Tchikislar—Colonel Shelkovnikoff—Starting for the Atterek—A night at Hassan-Kouli—Turcoman lady—Her costume—Primitive flour-mills—Ovens—Sulphide of iron small-shot—Sea-birds—Crossing the Atterek mouth—Sleighing on a mud bank—Across country—Nomad shepherds—Goklan Tepessi—A dervish moullah—An *usta-adam*—Bird's-eye view of delta—Burnt reed-fields—Tame and wild ducks—The Kizil-Alan—Pin-tailed grouse—Ak-Kala—Altoun-tokmok—An adventure with village dogs—Crossing the Giurgen—Ata-bai—Village of Nergis-tepé—Pomegranate jungle—Kara-Su—Arrival at Asterabad—Shah Abass' causeway—Mr. Churchill.

A FORTNIGHT after my arrival from Chatte, Colonel Malama, the Chief of Staff, intimated to me that all operations for the winter were at an end, and that I would feel myself much more comfortable at Baku during the dreary Caspian winter than amidst the camp, which he told me would be semi-deserted during that season. At the moment I had not quite made up my mind as to what course I should adopt, so I simply bowed in reply. 'When will you go?' said the Chief of Staff. 'Well, Colonel,' I replied, 'you know I have horses which I must dispose of; they are scarcely worth carrying across the Caspian; I don't want them at Baku, and I should like time to dispose of them.' With this diplomatic answer our interview terminated. Though I had not decided as to what I should do, my predominant idea was that I should remain upon the ground until the reopening of the campaign in the spring, as I should then be better acquainted with the preliminary operations; and

besides, I was not in love with the wild, dissipated life which an unoccupied person is almost forced, despite himself, to lead in the 'Oil City of the East.' I hoped that when the staff had left the camp at Tchikislar, if, indeed, such were their intention, I should be overlooked and allowed to remain behind. During a week I led an exceedingly dreary existence in my tent of more than circumscribed dimensions, trying to sleep when unoccupied with my notes and journal—trying to sleep, I say, because whether by night or by day it was not easy to find a moment's repose. At night, red mosquitoes filled the tent, and during the day, especially the mid-day, the ordinary black fly rendered sleep impossible. Whether in winter or in summer, these pests of this region never left the vicinity of a camp whose ill-ordered hygienic arrangements too plentifully supplied them and their offspring with the means of existence. At the end of the week, as one day towards two o'clock in the afternoon I lay upon the carpet which separated me from the moist sand, trying to forget the restless hours of the night, a Cossack entered my tent, and, shaking me by the shoulder, told me that Colonel Shelkovnikoff, an officer of Armenian extraction, then occupying the post of commandant of the camp, desired to speak with me immediately. I rose to receive the Colonel, who said, rather abruptly, 'I think Colonel Malama intimated to you that it would be better did you pass the winter at Baku, on the other side of the Caspian.' 'It is true,' I replied, 'but I have not yet been able to dispose of my horses.' 'Well,' rejoined he, 'horses disposed of or not, the orders of the Commander-in-Chief are that you quit the camp for Baku by the steamer which leaves at seven o'clock this evening.' At this I grew indignant. 'Colonel,' said I, 'I admit that the Commander-in-Chief' (General Tergukasoff, also an Armenian, and since deceased) 'has a perfect right to order me

to quit his camp, or even Russian territory, but I deny his right to dictate to me the route which I shall take in so doing. I will proceed at once to the frontier, and thence to Asterabad, the nearest point at which a British Consulate is to be found.' With this we parted. I waited until the hour fixed for my departure was approaching, and then ordered my tent to be struck and my horses saddled. A heavy downpour of rain was falling, and stormy gusts were sweeping from the landward. I sent my horses outside the camp, and followed them, lest notice should be taken of me, as would probably have been the case had I left mounted, and with baggage in marching order. Outside the guarded limits, I and my servant rode swiftly away in the direction of the Atterek River, the line beyond which Russia claimed no jurisdiction. I directed my steps towards Hassan-Kouli, the Turcoman village which I have already described. Towards six o'clock in the evening, on November 10, 1879, after wading across many a rain-filled channel and muddy expanse, I reached Hassan-Kouli. In this place the chief was a certain Moullah Nourri. I asked my way to his *kibitka*, and was hospitably received, especially as I was believed to be a person who was well able and willing to make an adequate 'present' when leaving. Up to this moment it had not been decided whether this Turcoman village was or was not within Russian jurisdiction, inasmuch as a branch of the river Atterek flowing across its delta once ran between it and the camp at Tchikislar. In the hurry of my departure I had forgotten to ask Colonel Malama for a passport declaring who I was and recommending me to the Persian authorities. However, halting for the night at the village, I gave instructions to my servant to ride off early in the morning to the Russian camp, and ask for the necessary document. Meantime, I had my first opportunity of seeing domestic Turcoman life.

In these regions the entire family, male and female, dwell under the one roof, which covers but a single circular apartment, not more than fifteen feet in diameter. As I entered, they told me that I was *khosh ǧeldi* (welcome), and I took my seat on a carpet beside the fire burning in the centre of the habitation. It was mainly composed of fragments and spars of fishing boats, and the smoke found exit by the customary circular opening in the roof, some six feet in diameter, and barred by radial spokes like those of a cart-wheel, A stately, rather solid-looking matron of some forty years, entirely unveiled, sat beside the fire. Near her was a colossal *samovar*, or tea-urn—a Russian institution which seems to have penetrated to the uttermost depths of Central Asia. Some young girls, her daughters, seated on either side, were busy grinding flour in a primitive horizontal hand-mill, kneading dough for the evening bread, or carding wool for the manufacture of carpets and the rude waterproof mantles worn by the Turcomans. The elder lady was clad in a shirt of coarse silk, of a dark purple colour, striped with black, and falling nearly to the ankles. This, excepting the close-fitting trousers of a darker tint, and drawn tightly round the ankles, was the only garment worn by her. Around her head was twisted a handkerchief of bright crimson silk, turban-wise, one extremity falling upon the left shoulder. On her neck was a massive silver ornament, resembling more the collar of a Newfoundland dog than any other object to which I can compare it, being at least an inch and a half in depth, and a third of an inch in thickness. At intervals round it were set flat oval cornelians, alternating with lozenge-shaped panels of embossed gold. From its front hung at least twenty silver chains, falling over berth east, and broken half-way down by lozenge-shaped pieces of silver, also embossed with gold, and supporting a cylinder of silver hanging below the level of the

waist, and containing talismanic writings, to preserve her from the Gins and other evil spirits which are supposed to haunt these Central Asian wildernesses. On either breast hung medal-wise a quantity of pieces of silver money, Russian five-rouble and Persian five-kran coins, so numerous that they presented the appearance of a cuirasse of silver. On either shoulder was a flat cylindrical silver box, about four inches in diameter, in the centre of each of which was also set a flat cornelian. Her long, coarse hair, plaited into two tails, which reached below the small of her back, was also profusely decorated with silver coins, growing larger towards the extremity of the plaited hair tail. On her wrists were massive silver bracelets—so massive, and apparently so heavy, that one could not but imagine that they must seriously interfere with the movements of her arms. They, too, bore the usual lozenge-shaped gold panels and flat cornelians. Turcoman women seem always to be in full dress, and I have rarely seen them, even when employed in laborious occupations, without it. A ponderous paraphernalia is a concomitant of respectability, as it is understood in these parts. The younger females were similarly, but less profusely and massively decorated. In fact, as I afterwards learned, nearly the entire capital of a Turcoman family is thus invested in family ornaments—a custom the adoption of which the ladies at home would probably hail with a great deal of pleasure. Still, for all their finery, there are no more hard-working members of society than the wives and daughters of the Khan's subjects. They perform with their own hands every detail of domestic labour; and the lady of the house herself not only superintends, but executes the making of the *pilaff* which constitutes the chief meal of the day. The sun had set some time when a large wooden dish of barley and rice, mixed with the broken-up

carcases of half a dozen wild ducks, and with some raisins and dried plums, was brought in. This might be styled the *pièce de resistance* of a Turcoman gentleman's family, were there aught else to supplement it. As it is, it forms the alpha and the omega of the meal—*entremets* and sweet dishes being combined in one grand whole. The family and guests sit cross-legged on the carpet, round the great wooden dish, and with fingers and thumbs supply themselves with what portions of the mess come handy. The meal ended, large bolsters are produced; each one cleans his fingers from the adhering grease by thrusting them separately and repeatedly into his mouth, and then, spreading his great sheep-skin overcoat above him, sinks to sleep just where he has eaten. In the morning, fully an hour before the faintest tinge of dawn is seen upon the horizon, one is roused by the low rumbling of the hand-mills as the ladies of the community grind the flour for the morning bread. This is baked in cylindrical open-topped ovens, situated some yards from the entrance to the house. The hand-mills are in all respects precisely similar to those which we find in museums as having been used in the households of the early Celts and Saxons of these isles—commonly known as *querns*. There is a horizontal nether millstone, about two feet in diameter, having a pivot hole in its centre. It is some four inches in thickness, and slightly convex. Upon it rests the upper stone, of equal dimensions, furnished with one opening near the axis, through which to introduce the corn to be ground, a kind of primitive 'hopper,' and near the circumference with another, in which a rude handle is inserted. This apparatus is laid upon a coarse cotton cloth, and a long red-shirted young lady squatted at its side takes from the wooden dish close to her handfuls of corn, which she pours little by little into the 'hopper,' all the time, with her right hand, causing the upper stone to revolve. The

coarsely ground flour falls out, at the junction of the stones, upon the cloth beneath. The cereal most in use is *arpa*, or a dark-coloured species of barley, and the resulting flour is anything but white. The ovens, which, as I have said, are situated outside the houses, at a few yards' distance from the door, are short truncated cones of loam, hollow in the interior; they are filled with rude brambles and morsels of decayed fishing boats, and the whole is set on fire. In anything like a considerable village, long before the first blush of dawn is seen, the sky is red with the reflection of a hundred blazing ovens. When the entire ignited mass has settled down to a cinder, the oven is ready for use. With a rude broom of tamarisk branches the cinders are swept to one side, and the cake of dough, an inch in thickness, is placed upon the scorching hearth. The red cinders are then swept over it, and in this primitive manner the bread is baked. This work, as well as every other household duty, is exclusively performed by females.

The morning meal, which takes place usually before the sun has shone out above the horizon, consists of bread, so fresh from the oven that it burns the tongue on being put into the mouth. It is washed down by weak green tea, usually sugarless. This decoction, made in a strange mediæval looking copper tankard, tastes at first precisely like Epsom salts.

Pending the arrival of my servant from the camp at Tchikislar with my Russian passport, gun in hand I strolled along the beach of the Hassan-Kouli lagoon, on this side half slob, half tide-pool. Ducks in hundreds swam in groups on every side, and allowed the shooter to get within close range of them. They do not seem at all afraid of the approach of human beings, unless one comes very close indeed. The Turcomans rarely give themselves the trouble to go shooting, and when they do so their

ammunition is little adapted to killing at long range. Though the Turcomans of the Caspian border and in the vicinity of Tchikislar are able to procure powder of European make, and though the old 1853 pattern muskets with which they are chiefly armed make capital ducking guns, lead shot is entirely beyond their reach, owing to the excessive prices charged for it at Asterabad, the nearest accessible market at which it can be procured without crossing the Caspian. In its place, grains of sulphide of iron are used. A bar of iron is heated to whiteness, and brought in contact with a lump of crude sulphur. The iron appears to melt, and, dropping from a height into a bowl of water, supplies a quantity of lava-like nodules of various dimensions, always of a more or less flattened form. These nodules are used as a substitute for leaden small shot. Beyond ten or twelve yards' range it is quite inefficacious against the stoutly feathered sea-birds, and again and again the Turcomans expressed their amazement at the distance at which, with superior projectiles, I was able to bring down duck. The birds seem perfectly aware of the range of the Turcoman guns, and do not disturb themselves until the hunter approaches very closely indeed to them.

It was a couple of hours after sunrise before my servant returned from Tchikislar, bringing with him the document kindly furnished by Colonel Malama, the Chief of Staff, which stated that I had been attached to the Russian columns, and recommended me to the Persian authorities at Asterabad. I immediately ordered my horses to be saddled, and my scanty baggage put in marching order. Though the Chief of Staff had been good enough to furnish me with the passport to which I have alluded, I did not feel quite sure that, Pharaoh-like, he might not afterwards repent of his decision, and send a squadron of Cossacks after me to fetch me back to the camp, and force me to

proceed to Baku, which Colonel Shelkovnikoff had intimated to me was the desire of the Russian authorities. Our way lay in a south-easterly direction, across a slimy waste of mud, in which our horses' feet sank fetlock-deep, and across which our progress was slow and disagreeable in the extreme. A couple of miles off to the left were some rudely constructed fishing sheds, with highly-pitched sloping roofs, elevated on stout piles in the midst of the shallow water. They belonged to an Armenian merchant, who had a very extensive establishment of the same description in the mouth of the Peri Bazaar river near Enzeli, and for which I had been told he paid the Shah no less a license tax than 40,000*l.* a year. Still further eastward are seen the low, sedgy banks of the river proper, before it merges in the lagoon, and, further off, vast forests of giant reeds, amidst which nestle countless myriads of sea-birds; ducks, cranes, flamingoes, and many other waterfowl of whose names I am ignorant crowd these marshy solitudes or wheel shrieking above the waters in such incredible numbers as to seem at a distance like an angry storm-cloud surging before a whirlwind. Whole battalions of waders fringed the muddy shores, and the all but stagnant waters of the lagoon were white with acres of gulls. Pushing on further still in a south-easterly direction, we crossed some disagreeably deep tidal guts, where the water reached to our horses' girths, and made us very cautious in our advance. Then a sand-spit was reached, and, at its extremity, a canoe, hollowed from a single tree-trunk, styled here a *täimul*, and conducted by an elderly Turcoman and his son, a boy of some twelve years, awaited us. We were close to the real channel of the Atterek, which here has excavated for itself a wide and tolerably deep bed. A few years ago the stream fell into the northern portion of the lagoon, but owing to quarrels among the Yamud Turcomans themselves

a dam was erected some miles inland which turned its course, and it now flows almost across the centre of the back-water. Even when the water is at its lowest, this channel is altogether unfordable; hence the necessity for the *täimul* when crossing to the southern bank. The saddles and other effects were placed within the canoe, in which I and my servant also embarked. For a hundred yards our progress was more like skating over a muddy surface than floating upon water, but gradually, very gradually indeed, the depth increased; our horses, whose bridles were held in our hands, stepped cautiously behind our frail bark, slipping and floundering as they picked their way over the muddy bottom. Gradually the water crept higher and higher along their limbs, until at length the animals were afloat. Horses in this part of the world take things like this coolly enough, and without the least hesitation they struck out, swimming close to our stern. Towards the middle of the channel the current is pretty rapid, and our flat-bottomed canoe heeled over in an alarming manner as it was paddled swiftly across the stream. A distance of fully half a mile had to be traversed before the horses lost their feet, and a third of a mile was swum across before they again touched bottom. Another half mile of paddling brought us again into excessively shallow water, where our old Turcoman and his son, stepping on to the mud, in which they sank nearly knee deep at every step, proceeded to drag us in the canoe to what they called the opposite shore. Shore, strictly speaking, there was none; the point at which we landed, if I may be permitted to use the term, in this case being one in which we sank mid-leg deep. It was absolutely necessary to leave the canoe, so that it might be dragged still further across the horrid mud-waste. I do not recollect that such a hideous wilderness of slime and desolation ever met my eyes, and, as we painfully

waded along, pulling our *täimul* behind us, we bore no distant resemblance to reptiles crawling over the surface of some Palæozoic morass.

Long and painful as was our progress southward, we could not soon succeed in reaching ground sufficiently solid to enable us to disembark our saddles and baggage, which were placed upon our horses direct from the canoe itself, as they stood alongside of it. It took a good half hour's diligent scraping to remove the blue-black shiny mud from our boots sufficiently to allow our feet to enter the stirrups, as we mounted from the back of our old boatman. Far and near stretched the desert solitude of marly mud, strewn with algæ and fish-skeletons. Then followed a long, dreary wading march, for the space of at least two hours. Nothing more desolate than these slimy wastes can well be imagined. It was a place where an ichthyosaurus might momentarily be expected to show himself, or some broad, dragon-winged pterodactyl come beating the wind heavily above one's head. Then the ground became firmer, and sparse tamarisk bushes and mossy streaks topped the scarped banks, while great heavy-winged vultures crouched lazily, gorged with their banquet of decaying fish. As the ground assumed a solider consistence, long coarse sedge began to appear, and great numbers of water trenches furrowed the ground. Whether these were irrigation canals, or merely accidental off-shoots of the scattered branches of the Atterek, crossing its delta, I am unable to say. They were most puzzling to the traveller, for in some cases so deep was the mud at their bottoms that it was really dangerous to attempt crossing, and when following their banks in search of a more practicable fording-point one completely lost his way, there being no prominent landmarks by which he could guide himself. Patches of a thin, hungry kind of oats began to show, indicating our

near approach to human dwellings, and after another hour's floundering among partially inundated marshy sedge-fields, we saw the beehive-looking *aladjaks* of the village of Atterek itself, situated near the centre of the delta. The people of this village enjoy an unenviable reputation as thieves and marauders, and even among the neighbouring Turcomans, themselves not over-scrupulous in their conduct, they are known as the *Karakchi*, or robber Turcomans *par excellence*. Worn out with hunger, I stopped to make some coffee. Though I wished to have as little as possible to do with the inhabitants, in order to procure fuel I was obliged to enter into conversation with some hang-dog looking shepherds who were tending a flock of scraggy goats and sheep. As I sat watching the fire they gathered round me curiously, evidently surprised to see two strangers venturing thus hardily among them. 'Were we not afraid to come there alone?' they asked. 'No,' I replied, 'what should I have to fear?' At this they smiled. Doubtless the sight of my revolving carbine and pistol rendered them much more honest and hospitable than they would otherwise have been. As I was quite unacquainted with the district, and as there is no trace of a road, I resolved to push forward, still in a south-easterly direction, until I struck upon the telegraph line extending from Tchikislar to Asterabad. By following this I should take the most direct line to the latter town. Before I had gone many hundred yards I struck upon the main southern branch of the Atterek, which winds in the most confusing manner. It was in vain I tried, at twenty different points, to ford it, and only after a couple of hours' wandering did I perceive, far away to the left, the telegraph poles, towards which I directed myself. I was fortunately able, by following the track of some camels, which I noticed in the mud, to discover the regular ford. Beyond the river branch,

and still to the left, rose a high earth cliff, where the stream had eaten away the side of a large escar-like hill. This is known as Goklan-Tepessi, the hill of the Goklans. On its southern slope was another village of *Karakchi* Turcomans, situated within twelve hours' march of Asterabad. As night was already falling, no choice was left me but to risk taking up my quarters for the night in this thieves' stronghold. Huge savage dogs rushed out to assail us as we drew near the *aladjaks*, and we were obliged to draw our sabres to keep them at respectful distance. The inhabitants were assembled for evening prayers, in the very peculiar kind of mosque used by the Turcomans, and which I have already had occasion to describe when writing of the village of Hassan-Kouli. The oddest thing about these praying enclosures is that no particular sanctity appears to attach to them as there does to the roofed structures of the more sedentary Mussulman. In fact I have occasionally seen them used for purposes the reverse of sacred, and which certainly, in the eyes of any Mussulman, would be sufficient to desecrate the most thrice-blessed spot of ground. Of course, after being thus defiled they are not used again for purposes of prayer, but a new enclosure is prepared. Thus we find in the neighbourhood of any considerable village some scores of impromptu *djamis*, or open-air mosques, which have been abandoned. The sun had already set, and the sea-fog which hung along this low-lying coast produced a gloom unusual in the twilight of these Eastern climes. I stood beside my horses at a little distance until the evening orisons were completed, and then, drawing near a group of elders, requested hospitality for the night. They were evidently as much surprised to see me, accompanied by but one servant, venturing into their midst, as were their brethren of the village of Atterek, and for some time an ominous silence reigned among them. They were clearly trying

to make up their minds whether they would accord me the sought-for hospitality, or proceed to confiscate my horses and other property, and it was with no small misgiving that I awaited the result of the conference. Presently, however, their better natures seemed to prevail, and an old, long-haired moullah motioned to me to follow him. The moullah, or priest, in Mahometan countries invariably has his head shorn as bare as his lay brethren, but should he belong to an order of dervishes he wears locks flowing upon his shoulders, and, with his egg-shell-shaped tiara, looks very like a 'pope,' as the Russian priest is termed.

Under circumstances such as these which I am describing, the chief, or at least one of the more important men of the community, usually takes charge of the stranger. In the present instance, however, I was conducted to the *kibitka* of the village smith. The furniture of the hut was miserable in the extreme, and denoted wretched poverty. Indeed, throughout the entire village the same was a salient feature. This is quite uncommon among the ordinary nomads, who as a rule are pretty well off—as well-being goes in these parts of the world—that is to say, they are well clothed, seldom, in their villages at least, lack adequate food, and the earthen floor of the *aladjak* is generally well furnished with carpets of no ordinary quality. After a while it struck me that the chief had relegated me to the smith's *aladjak* to conceal his own incapacity for entertaining me in a proper fashion. It was with difficulty that a kind of tattered quilt could be produced, on which I was invited to be seated. At one side were a diminutive anvil, a couple of hammers, and two or three flat bars of iron, probably purchased at Tchikislar. A heap of charcoal, and a rude bellows composed of a sheepskin, lying beside the fire, completed the entire stock-in-trade of this desert artisan. He was termed the *usta-adam*, the

nearest comprehensive rendering of which in English would be handy-man, or Jack-of-all-trades; for here there is no division into guilds, and one *usta-adam* acts in many capacities for the immediate population. He will make silver rings for the women, shoe horses, repair gun-locks, and even bleed a plethoric individual. In most Turcoman houses (especially in the neighbourhood of any Russian settlement) is to be found the *samovar*, or tea-urn. Here, in the entire village, there was not one. Neither was there tea, or sugar, or meat, or *pilaff* of any kind. A rude hand-mill was set in requisition, some coarse brown corn was ground, and a cake of bread was there and then got ready. This, with some rather salty water, was the only cheer which it was in the power of the smith to afford me. There was not even a *kalioun*, or water-pipe, amongst his household goods. One was borrowed from the moullah, but no tobacco was forthcoming, and it was with eager delight that my host witnessed the production by my servant of a bag of the coarse, shell-like *tumbaki* used by smokers in these regions. Ere long, visitors began to arrive—less to interview the stranger and learn his object in coming among them than to enjoy the unaccustomed luxury of a smoke from the water-pipe. These Turcomans, I was told, belonged to the Ata-bai tribe, but they seemed a very distinct sub-division of it, for they were Ishmaelites even among Ishmaelites. Their brethren of the same clan seemed to have fallen foul of them, and one of my visitors informed me that, a couple of evenings previously, their neighbours, the Ak Ata-bais, had surreptitiously carried off the greater portion of the horses which they possessed. It was with some uneasiness that I lay down to sleep, as I was in some apprehension that the people of the village might compensate themselves for the loss of their cattle by annexing mine before morning; and more than once in

the course of the night I rose and went to the door to see if they were still tethered where I had placed them. My host, to do him justice, seemed equally on the alert, and doubtless he had good reasons for being so. Each time that a horse neighed, or we heard a trampling of hoofs, as he rose to shake himself, we started to our feet, and, seizing our arms, rushed to the doorway. When morning came, however, matters turned out to be all right, and giving my entertainer the sum of five francs for the night's accommodation—a sum which he doubtless, poor man, seldom looked upon—I mounted, and taking leave of the chief, rode away along the crest of the Goklan-Tepessi hill to have a look at the surrounding country. The long, burnt-looking yellow sedgy grass grew plentifully around. I have often since, at all seasons of the year, seen this same kind of grass growing over different portions of the Turcoman plain, but never have I seen it of a green colour. Looking to the north and west from the hill-top, one had a capital view of the dismal expanse of the Atterek delta, its watercourses mapped out distinctly amid the reed and sedge-covered waste. Here and there were great pools of stagnant water, literally covered with aquatic birds, among which, in apparent good-fellowship, were to be seen fish-hawks, vultures, eagles, and carrion crows, forgetting their mutually combative tendencies in view of the bountiful supply of food which the half-stifled fish, wallowing one upon the other in the shallow water, afforded them. Here and there were patches of dense black, often half-a-mile in length, where the giant reeds of last year's growth had been burned down by the Turcomans to prevent wild boars and jackals harbouring within them, for the former animals play sad havoc with the little cultivation which the Turcomans practise, and the jackals are always at hand, looking out for the domestic fowls which are occasionally to

be found in the *aoulls*. *A propos* of domestic fowls, and especially in the villages bordering upon the sea coast and Atterek delta, great flocks of duck are reared by the inhabitants, but so nomadic are the habits of these birds, and so strong are they upon the wing, that it is all but impossible to distinguish them from their wilder brethren that people these solitudes in such vast numbers. I have frequently been astonished at seeing what I took to be a crowd of fifty or sixty mallards come flying into the midst of the village, and, forming in some open space, proceed to march in serried files into the *aladjak* devoted to them, and I have called down the wrath of the inhabitants upon my head by discharging my gun at them. They fly away for miles along the coast, keeping themselves carefully separated from the wilder sea-birds, and invariably return to their domicile at a certain hour in the evening.

Away to the south stretched the immense interfluvial plain, separating the Giurgen and Atterek rivers, the scarce perceptible water-shed separating the respective valleys crowned by the long line of *tepes*, or earth mounds, which mark the line of ancient fortifications known to the Turcomans as Alexander's Wall, or, as it is more usually styled, the *Kizil-alan*, or 'red road.' Further away still, beyond the faintly seen forest growths across the Kara Su, loomed the snow-streaked ridges of the Demavend range of mountains and to the right, along the Giurgen, the long line of ruined ramparts and towers marking the site of the now deserted town of Ak-Kala, once a principal seat of the Kadjar family—a member of which sits upon the throne of Persia to-day—and a powerful rival of Asterabad itself. It is now only a small mud fort, occupying the north-eastern corner of the old town, and garrisoned by a battalion of Persian infantry, which guards the bridge across the Giurgen, and at this point is all that remains of life in this

once populous locality. Two hours after sunset I started due southward, following the line of telegraph which leads direct to Asterabad. At every two or three hundred yards we disturbed immense flocks of pin-tailed grouse—*goolgairook*, as it is termed. In some of these flocks there cannot have been less than half a million birds. As they rose from the ground the surging of their wings sounded like distant thunder, causing our horses to start and rear with terror. The number of these birds that we met with on the plain passes all belief, and to me it seems marvellous that more use is not made of their flesh as an article of food, for when roasted they are excellent. Two hours' ride brought us to one of the principal mounds of the *Kizil-alan*. It is called the *Altoun-tokmok*. This word, in Turcoman dialect, signifies 'gold-receiver.' The name has been given to it owing to the frequency with which pieces of gold money have been found amidst the old parapet walls and towers of brick which still remain at intervals along its crest, just as the neighbouring mound of Gumush Tepé has been so called from the discovery of the large number of Alexandrian silver coins by some Turcomans when excavating a grave upon its summit. For many a weary mile the plain is absolutely unbroken, save where here and there some muddy irrigation stream, through being choked, has expanded into a treacherous mud-hole which inconveniently blocks the way. Around these water patches have sprung up hundreds of acres of the enormous reeds which characterise the Atterek district, and which harbour every species of wild animal. While endeavouring to wade across one of these disagreeable obstacles we met with some dozens of Arab muleteers from Baghdad, going with their gaily-caparisoned animals to the Russian camp at Tchikislar. These men ordinarily ply as carriers between their native city and Meshed, *viâ* Ispahan and Teheran. I

afterwards learned that these muleteers remained but a short time in the Russian service, so great was the terror inspired by the Akhal Tekké horsemen.

After eight hours' march, the ordinarily stunted and withered grass of the plains began to assume a more verdant appearance, and vast herds of sheep, goats, and cows were to be met with, attended by wild-looking men and boys, all of them wearing the preposterous black sheepskin hat of the country, and each armed with musket and sabre. Another hour's ride brought us to the village of Giurgen, close to the river bank. Here, as is usual when approaching a Turcoman village, we were furiously assailed by scores of gigantic wolf-like dogs, whose invariable custom it is to surround the stranger, who, if on foot, is often in serious peril. Riding into the centre of the village, I invited the Turcomans, who stood at the doors of their *kibitkas*, highly amused by the predicament in which I was placed, to call off their dogs, who were leaping savagely at my boots and my horse's nose, causing the poor beast to rear and kick furiously. One had seized by his teeth the extremity of the rather extensive tail of my charger, and, managing to keep out of range of his heels, held on like grim death. I drew my revolver and exhibited it to the Turcomans, assuring them that if they did not immediately call off their dogs I would make use of the weapon. To this threat they paid no attention, and I was obliged to turn in my saddle and fire fully into my assailant's mouth. As he rolled over on the sward, his companions, with the most admirable promptitude, withdrew to a safe distance; and the Turcomans, rushing out with sticks in their hands, proceeded to beat them still further off, though at first I supposed that the sticks were intended for my own person. But a few yards away lay the deep, *cañon*-like bed of the Giurgen itself,

fifty yards in breadth at its surface. The stream had cut its way in the stiff, marly earth to a depth of fully forty feet, and the earth cliffs went sheer down almost vertically. A little to the eastward of the village was an exceedingly steep ramp, leading to the water's edge, by which camels and horses had access to the ford. Unless accompanied by a guide it is often very dangerous for a stranger to attempt a crossing of this kind, for rarely, if ever, does the fordable path cross directly to the opposite bank. In the present instance a kind of earth ridge, whether natural or artificial I am unable to say, led obliquely up the river and allowed the horseman to pass, his horse just barely avoiding swimming when the water was low. The opposite bank of the river was so steep that we were obliged to dismount, and, scrambling on hands and knees up the brush-grown slope, with many a stumble, we dragged our horses after us. Immediately southward of the river, the welcome sight of green grassy surfaces and trees greeted our eyes. Right in front of us, at the edge of a dense forest, lay a village of the Ata-bai division of the Yamuds, called, after an ancient earth-mound close by, *Nergis-tepé* (Narcissus mound). The tomb of some modern Turcoman saint stood upon its top, and round its base was a line of breastwork, probably constructed by the hostile factions of the Kadjars during their struggles for supremacy in the early part of the century. The village itself was also strongly entrenched, as the Goklan and Tekké nomads made frequent incursions upon these Ata-bai Turcomans, who live, at least nominally, under Persian jurisdiction.

The Khan, a man of unusually large stature, and dark, sullen countenance, received me most ungraciously; but as he could not be sure as to who I was, or as to the nature of my mission, he was perforce induced to offer me hospitality in his *kibitka* for the night. Early next morning

our way lay through cultivated fields, principally of rice, occurring at intervals in the midst of elm forests, chenar (plane-tree) groves, and brakes of giant reed, twelve to eighteen feet in height, and inhabited, I was told, by leopards and boars. After a mile or so the cultivated fields disappeared, and we were forced to follow wild-boar tracks, through a dense jungle of pomegranate and thorn-bush, twined with creepers, to the swampy edge of the Kara-Su. Without following these tracks it would be utterly impossible to make one's way, unless by proceeding axe in hand as in the primæval forest. The ground was swampy, owing to the infiltration of the waters of the Kara-Su, and every kind of vegetation grew in luxuriance around us. Some cane and reed brakes had been burned down, and the springing shoots presented a deliciously green and tender appearance. After many months' sojourn amid the desolate surroundings of the Russian camp at Tchikislar, and on the plains reaching away to the eastward, it is impossible to describe how delightful all this wild luxuriance of vegetable growth was to our eyes. We had done with the interminable sand-wastes, and the pitiless sun-glow from the surface of the scorched desert. The horses, accustomed to munch the stunted bitter shrubs of the plains, resembling rather diminutive heath brooms that had seen much service than aught else I could call to mind, seemed beside themselves with delight, and could scarcely decide on which hand to choose a mouthful of succulent herbage, so great was the *embarras de richesses* around them. Ripe pomegranates dangled above our heads, and fell at our feet, as we forced our way along. After about an hour's ride through this belt of jungle, rice-fields once more appeared, and the road then lay through a fortified Persian village, a kind of suburb of the town of Asterabad. Then, through the more open glades, glimpses were caught of the pictu-

resque towers and ramparts of the town itself, gleaming yellowly in the noon-day sun. Seen from a distance, one might fancy himself enacting the part of the Kalendar in the 'Arabian Nights,' and, after a weary wandering amidst trackless deserts, coming suddenly upon the enchanted city.

Situated on the slopes of the Demavend Mountains, at all seasons of the year Asterabad is plentifully supplied with water, and as we neared the northern gate we crossed stream after stream, clear as crystal, flowing over their pebbly beds, and issuing by low archways under the town walls. In the shadow of the gate-arch sat the watchmen, smoking *kaliouns* of portentous dimensions, and keeping careful vigil lest any contraband merchandise should be introduced into the border city from the neighbouring Russian frontier. Then we threaded our way through the silent, ill-paved streets, where are the remains of Shah Abass the Great's once famous causeway. The huge paving stones, tossed and tumbled in the wildest confusion owing to the traffic and neglect of centuries, offer a serious obstacle, even to the most sure-footed mule. Between high, ruinous mud walls; then across an outlying street of the bazaar, with its rude sun-shade of leaves and branches stretching from housetop to housetop across the way; and up to the British Consulate, where I was most kindly received by Mr. and Mrs. Churchill.

## CHAPTER X.

### ASTERABAD.

Seat of the Kadjars of Persia—Old ramparts—Shah Abass' causeway—Wild boars, jackals, &c., in town—Atmospheric indices—Anecdote of Nadir Shah—Streets—Bazaar—Grocers, dyers, gunsmiths, &c.—Percussion gun-locks—Felt manufacture—Sun screens—Public story-teller—Turcomans and rice-dealers—Scarcity of grain in Mazanderan and Ghilan—Turcomans and Arabs in bazaar—Returned pilgrims—Persian mourning—Old Kadjar palace—Enamelled tiles—Rustam and the Div Sefid—Russian telegraphists and spoliation—'Blue china maniacs'—*Reflet métallique*—Theory and examples—Wild boars and Persian servants—Anti-Koranic cookery at British Consulate—Results—Persian domestics—Nadir Shah and his descendants—Pensions and employment—Title of Mirza—Intoxicating bread and enchanted trees—Outskirts of Asterabad—Outlying fort—View from its summit.

A DESCRIPTION of any North Persian town of considerable dimensions would fit Asterabad exactly, as far as physical features are concerned, but its position on the extreme frontier and its antecedents endow it with noteworthy characteristics. Up to the time at which the present royal family of Persia ascended the throne, Asterabad was the principal seat of the Persian monarchs. Another branch of the Kadjars had formerly occupied the town situated on the banks of the Giurgen, on the site of which now stands the Persian border fort of Ak-Kala, guarding the bridge of the same name. In this latter place and at Asterabad the rival branches of the Kadjar family had their respective head-quarters, and it was only after a protracted struggle that Asterabad took the foremost position, and that Ak-Kala was dismantled, and its inhabitants compelled to add

their numbers to the population of Asterabad. There are two derivations of the present name, according to one of which the Persian word *astra* (a star) would be a component. The name is also derived from *aster* (a mule), and would in this case imply that some former monarch of Persia had there established great mule stables. The town itself, as far as I could judge, is about three miles in circumference, and is surrounded by ramparts and towers of unbaked brick, averaging thirty feet in height from the general level of the ground outside. They are at present in a very dilapidated condition, though there is still a pretence made of mounting regular guard upon them. The towers, where not entirely fallen into ruin, have a flat conical roof of red tiles, and the top of the parapet wall is thatched with a covering of reeds, to prevent the occasional heavy rains from washing away the substance of the unbaked bricks of which it is composed. Only the base of the towers and walls is of baked brick, each brick being about a foot square and two and a half inches in thickness. Ruinous as is the condition of these walls, they are quite sufficient for the protection of the inhabitants against any *coup de main* which might be attempted by the Turcomans of the plains northward. Against an attack by a more formidable enemy its fortifications would be entirely useless, nor do I believe that the vainest Persian within its walls pretends otherwise. The *enceinte* of the ramparts is of an irregular quadrilateral form. There are three gates; one opening on the plains to the northward towards Tchikislar, another looking southward, and the third being in the western ramparts. The old paved causeway constructed by the orders of Shah Abass the Great issues by this latter gate, and leads towards what is called the port of Asterabad, at Kenar-Gez. To judge by the portions of this causeway which remain intact, it would seem to have been of solid,

workmanlike construction; the materials used were blocks of stone about a foot long by nine inches wide, roughly hewn, and forming a roadway some fifteen feet in width where it leaves the city gate, but narrowing to eight feet at the distance of a mile from the walls. The stone blocks, once evenly joined together, which form its surface, are now tossed about in wild confusion, and protruding from the bottoms of water-pools and mud-sloughs, constituting so many obstacles in the path of the traveller. Apparently since the day of the construction of this roadway, no attempt has ever been made to maintain it in a practicable condition. From the northern gateway another section of this causeway leads across the plains in the direction of Shahrood. Within an arched guardway at each gate the semblance of a military guard is kept up, though nothing like a regular sentry is to be seen. The traveller, on arriving, perceives a pair of superannuated muskets leaning against the walls; and some loose-vested Persians, squatting on a raised platform of brick, and smoking the inevitable *kalioun*, represent the custom-house officers. They keep a sharp eye upon the laden camels and mules entering the town, to see that rateable merchandise is not clandestinely introduced from the Russian frontier. The greater portion of the space within the walls is taken up, partly with gardens and bare open areas, and partly, especially at the corners of the town, with a wild growth of jungle and briars. Here, at all hours of the day, and particularly towards sunset, wild boars and their broods, jackals, foxes, woodcocks, and snipes are to be found. During my stay in the place I repeatedly visited these intra-mural hunting grounds in search of them. Along the ramparts are rain gullies and fallen portions of the parapet, which form gaps through which the wild boars enter and make their exit at will. I have seen as many as

eight or nine of the latter, old and young, burst away from the briar thickets as I approached, and have watched them careering across the rice and maize fields outside, until they found shelter in the dense forest growth along the water-courses south of the town. As regards jackals, the numbers in which they assemble at nightfall, both outside and within the ramparts, are incredible. They are attracted by the dead bodies of horses, asses, and dogs, which are left lying in the more remote thoroughfares, and, passing at night by one of these carcases, one is pretty sure to see three or four jackals start away from their uncanny feast. The old ditches of the town are entirely choked up with briars and bushes, the haunt of every wild animal indigenous to the district, including the lynx and the leopard, but the latter rarely ventures within the ramparts. During the night the yelping wail of the jackal scarce ceases for a moment, and even under the very windows of the houses within the town itself, these impudent intruders are to be heard uttering their singular cry, in which they are generally joined by the numerous dogs of the town. The inhabitants say that when the dogs answer the cry of the jackals, it is a sure forerunner of fine weather, but that if the dogs remain silent rain or storm is certain to follow. I believe this to be tolerably correct, for I have on more than one occasion observed the accuracy of the prediction. In the north-eastern angle of the town is a quadrangular enclosure surrounded by parapets of very considerable relief, the town walls forming two sides of the space. This is the old citadel, and it is curious that in all North Persian fortified towns, both ruined and otherwise, which I have had opportunities of examining, the citadel invariably occupies this position in the north-eastern angle. This citadel is said to have been constructed by a governor of the town during the reign of the celebrated Nadir Shah,

who flourished about a hundred and fifty years ago, with the view of affording himself a safe asylum against his numerous enemies both within the town and in the surrounding territory. Nadir Shah, a soldier of fortune himself, heard of these new fortifications, and, with a jealousy characteristic of him, sent to the governor to ask the meaning of his military preparations, deeming, perhaps, that the defences were constructed with a view of serving as a *point d'appui* to one of those local rebellions which seem to have been the order of the day in Persia at that period. The governor excused himself by stating that his defensive works were meant only for his own personal protection. Nadir Shah replied, 'While I am living to protect you, you need not trouble yourself about your enemies, and when I am dead, it will be time for you to die also.' I cannot vouch for the historical accuracy of this story. 'I give the tale as told to me' by the denizens of Asterabad.

As in most Eastern towns, all the animation of the place is concentrated in the bazaar; the rest is buried in hopeless dulness and dreariness. There are long, narrow, ill-paved streets, at best but a series of mud-holes, hemmed in by tall mud-walls, the houses, which occur at intervals, having their sides next the street, being entirely windowless, and presenting a blank expanse of plastered loam. Rubbish heaps are seen here and there, for the offal and off-scourings of each establishment are deposited in front of the little sally-port door, right in the middle of the street, and left to be trodden down to a level with the remainder of the roadway. There is no public functionary whose business it is to look after the rubbish; hence the state of the streets may be better imagined than described. The only redeeming point in the midst of all this desolate loneliness and filth is that the tall mud walls are invariably topped by cluster-

ing vine-tendrils, the dense foliage of the *chenar*, or the white blossoms of the almond and plum trees growing within. The appearance of the exterior of his house is a matter of secondary importance to an Oriental; it is within doors that he concentrates all that he can afford of luxury or elegance, and this, in the majority of cases, is not much. In these silent thoroughfares one meets but few persons; most of the inhabitants are either at the bazaar or within their houses. The streets of an Eastern town offer but few attractions to an *habitué* of it. This oval blue bundle, set on end, which comes gliding silently towards us, is a Persian lady, wrapped in the all-enveloping mantle of calico which shrouds her from head to heel, and is here styled the *feridgi*. From the summit of her forehead hangs a white linen veil, forming a point upon the centre of her breast, and concealing the face much more effectually than the modern *yashmak* of the Osmanli Turks, as worn by the fashionable ladies of Constantinople. The copious trousers are gathered in at the ankle in numerous elongated plaits, and terminate in the stocking, which is continuous with the trousers. These grooved, inverted cones of cloth, seen below the edge of the *feridgi*, give the wearer the appearance of having substituted two old-fashioned family umbrellas for her legs. The high-heeled slippers have just barely enough of upper to enable their owner to bear them upon the points of her toes. The heel, which is placed nearly under the centre of the foot, slaps up and down at each step. At Asterabad, as elsewhere in Persia, it is only the better class of Persian ladies who veil themselves. The females of the peasant and working classes make no attempt to conceal their features, but, should a man happen to be in conversation with one of them, he invariably, as a matter of etiquette, keeps his face half averted, and his eyes fixed upon the ground.

The bazaar consists of a labyrinth of narrow streets, lined on each side with the booths of the traders and artizans. These booths, or shops, as I suppose some of them must be called, are merely square recesses, eight or ten feet wide, and as many deep, only separated from the street by a kind of step-like platform of wood or stone, on which the dealer arranges the commodities he has for sale, and behind which he sits, cross-legged, as a rule smoking the scarcely ever unlighted *kalioun*. All those of one business or trade have a separate street or quarter to themselves. The more numerous are the grocers, or general dealers, whose booths seem to be furnished with every imaginable article of which the inhabitants stand in need. In addition to the orthodox tea, coffee, sugar, rice, and spices, they also sell ink, paper, percussion caps, bullets, iron small-shot, gunpowder, brass drinking cups, salt, knives, sulphate of iron, pomegranate rind, alum for dyeing purposes, and an infinite variety of other articles. Turning a corner, we come into an alley where ropes suspended from housetop to housetop support numberless curtains of deep blue and olive green calico. This is the quarter of the dyers, who seem to be, in point of number, the strongest after the *bakhals*, or grocers. They are to be seen working at their great indigo troughs, clad only in a dark-tinted waistband and skull-cap, their arms, up to the elbows, being of as dark a blue as the calico which hangs outside. A little further on, towards the outskirts of the bazaar, are the vendors of fruit and vegetables, whose leeks and lettuces, spread in front of their booths, are a constant temptation to the passing camels and horses. More than once I have had to pay for the escapades of my horse in snatching up a bunch of spring onions and incontinently devouring it under the nose of the merchant. There were great basketsful of pomegranates and oranges, for Asterabad and its neighbour-

hood are famous for both these fruits, especially for the mandarin orange. Our ordinary orange is known as the *portugal*, while the *naranj* is quite as sour as any lemon, and takes the place of that fruit in cookery or with tea. Near the centre of the bazaar is a long street devoted to the coppersmiths, who manufacture tea-pots, saucepans, and cauldrons, for almost every cooking utensil used in this part of Persia is of copper, tinned inside, the facility of working copper more than compensating for the extra price of the material; moreover, the old vessels, when worn out, can be sold for a price very nearly equal to their cost when new. Now and then are to be seen cast-iron pots of Russian manufacture, but these are much more in use among the Turcomans of the Atterek than in Persian households. These copper utensils are wrought by hand, and the din of hammering which salutes the ear as one enters the particular quarter of the smiths is perfectly deafening. By sheer force of hammering upon peculiar knob-like anvils, the bottom cylinder of copper, three quarters of an inch in thickness, is made to expand to the most formidable dimensions. When finished, it is placed upon the fire, heated to dull redness, and a lump of tin is rubbed round its inside. In this street there is one particular spot which is set apart for those whose special occupation it is to cover the insides of pots and pans with tin. Then there are the gunsmiths and sword makers, who live in separate, though adjacent quarters. Here one may see every stage of the manufacture of a musket or rifle, from the forging of the barrel to the rude process for grooving it, and the fashioning of lock, stock, &c., all by the same workman. Asterabad enjoys a certain renown in Persia for the manufacture of gun-locks, and I have heard of a detachment of the nondescript soldiers who constitute the bulk of the Persian army being sent to this town, with their gun-locks out of order, so that they

might be repaired. It is a singular fact that, neither in Persia nor among the Turcomans, even in the most remote districts, does one ever see a flint lock. They are invariably percussion. The locks are evidently exactly copied from a European model, even as regards the very carving and ornamentation; they have nothing whatever Oriental in their appearance. The operations of the dealers in swords are generally confined to the manufacture of new scabbards, and the rehabilitation of old blades, for there seems to be a glut of the latter, which has doubtless existed from time immemorial in Persia, so that the manufacture of new blades is seldom entered upon. There are half a dozen booths in which the jewellers and gold and silver smiths ply their trades. They are strictly operatives, and do not keep any stock on hand. If you wish for some article in silver or gold, such as a buckle, button, or sword-mounting, you must, when giving the order, supply the artist with gold or silver coin, as the case may be. He melts this down, and manufactures it into the desired object.

The most important, and, indeed, almost the only extensive manufacture carried on at Asterabad, is that of felt carpets and mats, and the quarter occupied by the makers of these articles is one of the largest in the bazaar. I had noticed the excellence of the felt in use among the Turcomans of Krasnavodsk and Tchikislar, and had purchased several carpets of that material for use in my own *kibitka*. Until I came to Asterabad I was sorely puzzled as to the process by which this material was manufactured, but there I had ample means of informing myself upon the subject. Instead of being mere rectangular spaces, opening off the thoroughfare, each felt maker's quarters consisted of a room twenty to thirty feet in length by about fifteen in breadth, with either a boarded floor or one of perfectly level beaten earth or cement. The raw material—a mixture of camel

and goat hair and sheep's wool well beaten up together, and varying in proportions accordingly as the felt was intended to be dark brown or white—was laid in a loose layer about four inches in thickness upon a closely woven mat of fine reeds, somewhat larger than the piece of felt was intended to be. This was then beaten down with heavy, flat pieces of wood, until it was reduced to half its original thickness, and had assumed a compact texture. The ornamentation, generally consisting of arabesques and rude flowers of different brilliant colours, was put on by loosely spun worsted thread, which was laid by the hand in the required form. A strong, warm mixture of size and water was then copiously sprinkled over the whole, and the layer of felt material, together with the reed mat, rolled concentrically into a cylindrical form. In such guise the matting intervened between the layers of felt. The whole was then bound tightly with cords, and three or four men, placing their right feet naked upon it, all pressing simultaneously, rolled it slowly and by jerks from one end of the apartment to the other. As the felt grew thinner and denser, the combination was rolled more and more tightly, being undone from time to time to allow of a fresh saturation with size. When the felt had assumed the proper dimensions, and was considered to be sufficiently kneaded together, it was spread out in the sun to dry, the coloured pattern being thoroughly incorporated with the substance of the newly-formed carpet. The solidity and durability of this felt is wonderful, as I have been able to judge from having used a square of it as a saddle cloth for over twelve months without its in any way showing a breakage, or, even when exposed to heavy rain, becoming undone or at all loosened in the texture.

The main central streets of the bazaar are roofed over with brick groining, which has holes in the side of each

cupola to admit light, but the majority of them are simply covered with a sun-screen composed of rude poles reaching from the top of one shop to that of another across the way, and loosely thatched with reeds and small tree branches. In some cases gourds and grape vines twine among the rough rafters, the fruit hanging pendulously above the heads of the passers-by, and adding a redeeming feature of elegance to the general surrounding uncouthness. At street crossings, and through gaps where this roofing has fallen away, the blinding sunlight pours, throwing the adjacent portions of the bazaar into comparative obscurity by its contrast, and causing its inhabitants, half seen athwart the torrent of rays, to look like so many ghostly occupants of a haunted cavern.

At the central point of the bazaar, whence branch off the main thoroughfares, is almost always to be found the Eastern story-teller—generally a wandering dervish. I recollect seeing such a public novelist at this point, seated upon a door-step, and holding a numerous audience entranced by the narrative which he was relating. He was a young man, of a rather distinguished type of feature, and long, glossy, raven hair flowed upon his shoulders. He wore a large Tartar hat of black sheepskin, carried a stout staff of about five feet in length, and had his calabash basket, for the reception of contributions, laid beside him. The exigencies of the story seemed to require that he should have some tangible object to address. He accordingly placed his great sheepskin tiara in the centre of the roadway, and apostrophised it with the most ludicrous earnestness, at the same time mimicking the replies which he was supposed to receive. It was evidently a humorous story, for the group of idlers and small boys standing round, and the merchants leaning over their wares, occasionally burst into loud and prolonged shouts of laughter. These dervishes have a never-failing method of extracting money from their listeners.

Were the story to be completed without interruption, the receipts would probably be very small indeed, for in this regard a Persian is utterly unconscientious. If he can get anything for nothing he will not allow any feelings of generosity to step in. The dervish, well knowing this, continued his narration until he reached the culminating point of interest, and had wound up the feelings of the audience to the highest pitch. Then, taking up his calabash, he went the round of the crowd, saying that he required some encouragement to enable him to proceed with the wonderful sequel of his tale. His demand satisfied, the story was proceeded with. He shook his stick at the being that was embodied in his head-dress, raved at it, implored it, and ended by weeping over it. The acting was of no mean order, and a story-teller who possesses histrionic powers to any creditable extent is always sure of a crowd of eager listeners, no matter how old or how well-known the story which he recounts may be, just as we go to the theatre to hear a drama with which we are well acquainted interpreted by some celebrated actor.

In the streets of the bazaar are generally congregated a dozen Turcomans from the outlying villages along the Giurgen, endeavouring to exchange sheepskins against the various commodities which the Persians offer for sale, or trying underhand to procure gunpowder and percussion caps, for the sale of these articles to the nomads is strictly forbidden by the central government. At the time of which I write, too, in Ghilan and Mazanderan, the dearth of cereals, owing to a succession of droughts, was so great as almost to amount to a famine. Owing to this fact, horses were being sold at almost nominal prices, their owners finding it impossible to maintain them, in consequence of the ruinous price of corn. The Turcomans also suffered by reason of this dearth in Persia, for as a rule they

cultivate but little themselves, or at least did up to that time. They derived nearly the whole of their supply of rice from the North Persian provinces. Owing to the existing state of affairs, the Persian Government had issued a strict order forbidding the exportation of rice or corn of any kind, having an eye, no doubt, to the very large demands made by the Russian Commissariat at Tchikislar, which if complied with would create a severe artificial famine in those districts where there was already danger of a natural one. Though the Turcomans south of the Giurgen river acknowledge the government of the Shah, and pay an annual tax of one *toman*—equivalent to about ten francs—on each house, these wild subjects of Persia were included among those to whom corn was forbidden to be supplied. I have seen a Turcoman from the plains, who came to buy rice for the support of his family, and who had been refused by the merchant, standing in the middle of the street, calling down all kinds of curses on the rice-dealer's head, and consigning him, his predecessors, and his posterity, to Gehennum. It seemed hard that this Turcoman should be obliged to return to his family unable to procure for them the food necessary for their daily subsistence, but he and his fellows who were then refused were to a great extent to blame for the predicament in which they found themselves. Most of these partially-settled Turcomans who dwell along the Atterek and Giurgen rivers usually lay in at harvest time, when prices are lowest, a stock of rice and other grain sufficient to last them during the ensuing twelve months. Tempted by the high prices given in the Russian camp, large numbers had disposed of their stock, thinking that they could replace it in the Persian markets. Indeed, for a length of time many Turcomans thus carried on an extensive trade, acting as middlemen between the Persians and the Russians. It was

probably with a thorough knowledge of these circumstances that the Kargusar, or agent of the Minister for Foreign Affairs at Asterabad, had issued the stringent orders the effects of which I had seen in the bazaar.

The Turcomans frequenting Asterabad generally come to the town fully armed—sabre at side, poniard in belt, and double-barrelled gun at back, permission being accorded to them to enter the town thus equipped probably in recognition of the fact that they are subjects of the Shah. In other border Persian towns further to the east, and frequented on market days by the Tekkés, the latter were obliged to leave their swords and guns with the guard at the gate of the town, retaining only the poniard, or more strictly speaking the knife, which the Turcoman rarely parts with. The throng was occasionally varied by the grave, stately form of a Baghdad muleteer, with his diadem-like head-dress of twisted camel-hair over the sombre-tinted mantle which protects his head from the sun and weather and envelopes his whole person. These Arabs do not generally come so far northward, but on this occasion were probably on their way to the Russian camp.

Whenever a pilgrim returns from one of the holy places—from Mecca, Kerbela, Meshed, or Kufa, he takes care to make the world aware of his newly-acquired sanctity. He rides through the bazaar and other public places, a crier preceding him and announcing the fact that a pilgrim has returned to his native city. Even women, unaccompanied, though closely veiled, thus proceed in triumph through the public places, and though the sight is one of pretty frequent occurrence, it seems always to attract a crowd of lookers-on.

Among other curious Persian customs is the mode of expressing grief for the death of a friend or relative. Theoretically, the grieving one should tear his clothes, and bare and throw dust upon his head in true Oriental fashion;

but as most Persians are not in a position to treat their garments in this manner, or, if in such a position, are by no means disposed to do so, they confine themselves to a very limited and representative kind of rending. A seam at the shoulder is carefully ripped open to the extent of an inch, or an inch and a half, and perhaps the end of the collar of the shirt is slightly undone, so that a small tongue of linen may protrude in front, and thus convey to the beholder that, although the tearing is little more than metaphorical, still custom has been complied with, to however slight an extent.

Near the centre of Asterabad stands the old Kadjar Palace, where the Turkish family of that name once held their Court. At the time of my visit it was mainly occupied by the Persian Governor of the town, by various Government officers, and by the Persian and Russian telegraphic bureaux—the latter in direct communication with the camp at Tchikislar. Since then, however, the Russian rights in the telegraph line, with all its material and apparatus, have been handed over to the Persian Government.[1] According to an agreement drawn up between the two Governments, the Persian messages were all despatched between sunrise and sunset, the Russians having the exclusive use of the wire to Teheran and Tabriz during the night. For a place like Asterabad this old palace is one of considerable pretensions. It is built of large flat baked brick, of a reddish-brown colour, its porticos being supported with carved and painted oak pillars. The walls of the main building and those of the inner courtyard are covered with finely-enamelled tiles, a foot square, ornamented with arabesques, inscriptions, and pictorial illustrations of that never-failing theme of Persian art, the adventures of Rustam, and his final combat with and conquest of the Div

[1] This was on account of the laying of the Baku-Krasnavodsk cable, which gave Russia independent trans-Caspian communications of her own.

Sefid, a theme drawn from Persian mythology, and which seems as a rule to be the sole subject which can inspire a Persian pencil. Persians certainly have not that abhorrence of representations of living creatures which seems so universal among the Sunnites, for not only at the Kadjar Palace of Asterabad, but on the panels and over the door of every *café* and bath, as well as on the lintels of the very mosques, are to be seen depicted in gaudy colours, if not this same story of Rustam and the Div Sefid, other human figures, both male and female, the wine-cup being no infrequent addition to the picture. There are great water tanks, fifty or sixty yards in length, girt with stone parapets, and with what were once fountains in their midst; and enclosed within the walls of the establishment are large spaces, once, I understand, superb gardens, and 'still where many a garden flower grows wild.' With the exception, however, of a few neglected rose-bushes and some orange trees, there is little to be seen within these walls save weedy growths and tangled sedge struggling amid the dense brambles. I regret to say that the desire for encaustic tiles, and the 'blue china' mania in general, have wrought sad havoc with the decoration of this historic edifice. Here and there the walls had been stripped of their ornamental coverings, and the white plaster in which they were embedded stared in an unsightly manner beside half the head of Rustam and the tail of the Div Sefid. On inquiry I was informed, I do not know with what truth, that this spoliation was the work of the Russian telegraph *employés*, who had forwarded the tiles for sale in Russia; but I have no doubt that the Persians themselves, hearing that such things were eagerly sought for in Teheran and Europe, and fetched handsome prices, had done their share of the destruction. When I first saw the old palace, only a few of the tiles had been removed. Six months later, when I

again visited it, the enamelled panels were hopelessly disfigured and broken up. Should the devastation have gone on at the same rate ever since, but little can remain of this ancient example of early Persian art. *A propos* of this, the blue china and Keramic craze had taken fast root in Asterabad among its European inhabitants, and what I was informed were priceless specimens of early Persian pottery were unearthed by the enthusiasts from the forgotten closets and dusty shelves of inhabitants in the possession of whose families they had remained for many centuries.

The peculiarity of this Persian pottery is that, while it has all the external appearance of the finest porcelain, it is really composed of delicate brown earthenware, somewhat resembling hardened Roman cement, and covered upon the outside with a thick creamy glaze. Some of the plates and dishes of large size present, on a white ground, patterns in that beautiful blue tint so much admired by the 'maniacs' at home, but the tinting is by no means confined to this colour. There is a peculiar kind of bottle, closely resembling in form those Indian water-bottles of porous clay, but of slenderer neck and far more graceful form, the body often presenting a series of lobe-like divisions similar to those of a peeled orange. These generally have that golden, purple, or amber gleam, with prismatic colours when seen obliquely, which is known to the initiated as *reflet métallique*. The colours seen when the surface is viewed by reflected light are exactly similar to those observed on the surface of still water over which is spread a slight film of tar. Some of these bottles are reputed to be of great age, dating back, it is averred, over eight hundred years. This conclusion is arrived at from the position and nature of the sites from amidst which they were dug up. The art of producing this delicate Keramic ware is now entirely lost in Persia,

the native pottery of to-day being of the rudest and coarsest description. The plates and dishes in use among the better class of Persians are either of silver, tinned copper, or porcelain imported direct from Russia or China. Some two or three centuries ago an effort was made to revive the art of manufacturing earthenware similar to the ancient specimens, and artists, invited from China, established themselves at Cashan. At their manufactory were produced the later specimens of finer Persian earthenware, particularly the large dishes with the deep blue pattern which I have mentioned above, and which are known to the inhabitants by the name of *Cashis*. These artists, not receiving due encouragement, returned to China, taking with them the secret of the glaze with which they concealed the roughness of the material forming the basis of the articles which they produced. There is some difference of opinion as to the nature of this *reflet métallique*, so much admired by collectors. Some will have it that the peculiar prismatic effect and golden tints were intentional, and knowingly produced by the artist, while on the other hand there are those who maintain that it is the result of decomposition of the silicates contained in the glaze, just as we see prismatic colours produced upon old lachrymatories and other ancient vessels taken from Roman and Etruscan tombs. I have seen an example of *Cashis* which seemed to support this latter theory. It was in the possession of Mr. Churchill, the then British Consul at Asterabad, who had purchased it in the place itself. It was a large flat dish, nearly two feet in diameter, and of a brownish amber tint. Some irregular dashes of deep grass-green colour served as ornamentation, and on viewing its surface obliquely I could distinctly perceive that where the brown and green colours touched, there were irregular streaks of *reflet métallique*, so distributed that it was quite impossible

they should have been intended as part of the general decorative effect. I give this example for what it is worth, as I do not pretend to be an expert in these matters.

I have already alluded to the wild boars which penetrate within the walls of the town. They occur in extraordinary numbers in the surrounding country, and, looking from the ramparts over the adjoining fields of springing rice and corn, one sees them dotted at intervals of eight or ten feet with the large black heaps where the boars have been at work, rooting up the soil. One might imagine that a detachment of sappers had been engaged in throwing up a series of rifle pits, or that the ground had been subjected to a heavy plunging fire of shells. Such is the devastation produced by the wild boars and their broods that it is found worth while to maintain a body of professional hunters, whose sole occupation is to destroy these animals. Enormous quantities are killed annually, but their numbers do not appear to be perceptibly lessened. The inhabitants never on any account make use of the flesh of the boar as food, being in this respect unlike the Sunnite Turcomans, who will sometimes eat boar's flesh, though they do not like to do so openly on all occasions. While at Asterabad I observed an amusing instance of the aversion with which the flesh of the boar is regarded by the Shiia Persians. Mr. Churchill, whose kind hospitality I was at the time enjoying, was exceedingly desirous of obtaining some wild boar's flesh, but though he made repeated attempts to induce the hunters to bring him a quarter of one of the animals which they were killing every day, he could not succeed. At length, however, a hunter specially retained by himself to furnish him with game of different kinds agreed that as soon as he had shot a boar within a reasonable distance of the town he would give notice to that effect immediately, so that a portion of it might be secured before

the jackals discovered and devoured the carcass. By these means a head, a couple of hams, and other portions of the animal were procured, and were conveyed with the greatest secresy to the Consulate. The cook, by dint of lavish bribery, had been persuaded to prepare some of the flesh, but he only undertook to do so on condition of the affair being kept a profound secret between himself and the Consul. However, his fellow-servants by some means discovered that wild boar was being cooked in the house, and at once entered a protest, and one day the whole of them, including the cook, appeared in a body before Mr. Churchill, and respectfully begged to state that they could no longer remain in the house. The cook said that as he passed through the bazaars he was scornfully pointed out and jeered at by the merchants and passers-by as a cooker of boar's flesh, that his life was miserable, that even his own family avoided him, and that he could not endure such suffering. A compromise was arrived at, and the cook and other servants agreed to remain on condition that the object of their abhorrence, the remaining boar's flesh, be immediately thrown out, which was accordingly done. This will give some idea of the intense religious prejudices of these people. Yet these very servants, who are so scrupulous in the matter of adhering to Koranic diet, are in other matters, such as cheating their employers in the most egregious and bare-faced manner, influenced by no scruple whatsoever. Neither are they virtuous in the matter of intoxicating drinks, for a Persian, of this or any other class, will drink himself into a state of blind inebriation on every possible occasion, although the consumption of these liquors is quite as much at variance with the teaching of Mahomet as the eating of the flesh of 'unclean' animals. A Persian servant does not as a rule ask high wages, forty francs per month being considered

fair average pay; but he counts upon at least doubling this sum by illicit gains and fraudulent transactions in the market. It is vain to imagine that such robbery can be avoided. In Persia it is entirely *infra dig.* for a European of any standing to make his own purchases at a bazaar, and even if he did so he would infallibly be cheated by the merchant, as he cannot possibly be aware of the fluctuations in the prices of the articles which he requires. The servant and the shopkeeper conspire to make an overcharge, the extra profit thus obtained being divided between them. The latter individual dares not refuse this arrangement, as in such a case the servant would carry his custom elsewhere. The same system is adopted in the purchase of oats and fodder for horses, and in every other imaginable matter in which the Persian servant has the handling of the smallest amount of money. Apart from their thievishness, Persian servants are, as a rule, exceedingly insolent, unless they be kept within proper bounds with a strong hand. The use of the stick as a punishment for dishonesty and disobedience is a matter of every-day necessity throughout Persia, and the castigation is technically known among the culprits as 'eating the sticks.'

While staying at Asterabad, I met with an interesting personage—the great-grandson of the celebrated Nadir Shah, the last monarch who ruled over old Persia in its entirety, from Candahar to Tiflis, and from the Persian Gulf to the Oxus. The Shah Zadé, or prince, as this gentleman was entitled, was between sixty and seventy years of age, and of a remarkably truculent expression of countenance. His vast forehead, widening towards the top, and receding markedly, his pointed hooked nose, arched near the brow, and his small, cruel grey eyes, gave him, I was told, a very strong resemblance to his renowned ancestor. Like all the other Shah Zadés in Persia, and

their name is legion, whose descent from a former sovereign is well authenticated and indubitable, Zenghis Mirza was in receipt of a pension from the Shah amounting to the munificent sum of sixty *tomans*, or 24*l.* sterling, per annum. This was given in recognition of his real descent. The amount does not strike a European as being large, but a native Persian in a provincial town can subsist comfortably upon it. Besides this allowance to the Shah Zadés, care is taken to provide them with Government employment of one kind or another, generally as chiefs of telegraphic bureaux. When I was at Asterabad, the chief of the telegraph station there was another Shah Zadé, a grandson, if I do not mistake, of Feth Ali Shah. I afterwards met with another descendant of Nadir Shah, a Shah Zadé named Daoud Mirza, who was one of the principal officials in the Meshed telegraph office. This title of Mirza, when used as a suffix, means 'prince,' but when placed before the name simply signifies a secretary, or scribe. The derivation of the name, as I am informed, is Emir Zadé, or 'son of prince.' Why it should be applied as a prefix to the name of a secretary it is difficult to say; perhaps it is because in the days when the title originated only such regal persons were supposed to possess the accomplishments of reading and writing. This, however, is only a hypothesis of my own.

The inhabitants of Asterabad hold the peculiar belief that the bread made in the town exercises an intoxicating influence upon strangers; and there are trees standing beside one of the numerous streams which traverse the town—centennial *chenars* (lime trees), with great branching roots arching the channel, which are supposed to bewitch the individual who stands under their spreading boughs after the sun has set. Half-witted people are pointed out among the population, and the Asterabadi will

tell you, with a grave shake of the head, that 'that is what comes of standing under such-and-such a tree after nightfall.'

The outskirts of Asterabad are eminently fertile, and highly cultivated, especially to the south and west. The water-supply is copious, for perennial streams flow from the huge mass of the Elburz mountains, which, rearing their terraces height over height deep into the blue sky of Persia, and clothed high up their slopes with a dense forest growth, form a picturesque background. These woods, which even in the plain leading to the base of the mountains, mingle largely with the cultivated ground, abound with every kind of game, pheasants especially; and the *ahou*, or mountain antelope, often strays from his craggy abode, particularly during the winter, when snow covers the herbage. To the west of the town, and connected with it by long lines of ramparts enclosing a triangular space three quarters of a mile in length, is a steep, artificially terraced hill—some work of fortification reared in past ages to dominate and protect the large watercourse which, flowing from the hills, joins the Kara-Su. It is ordinarily the camping place for the Persian troops when, as is usually the case, a considerable force garrisons Asterabad. From the summit of this mound a magnificent view of the plains stretching north and east is obtained—a vast, violet-grey sea of dreamland, with mingled zones of ethereal orange and azure, its horizon mounting to meet the vaguely tinted sky that hangs over it; the home of mystery, replete with the memory of colossal events in the history of the human race; across which have swept the hordes of Zenghis and of Timour, and doubtless many another army, in the dim old prehistoric days. Even as I gazed, an army was marching across these expanses towards the east—the reflux of the tide of nations that had so long set westward.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FROM ASTERABAD TO GUMUSH TEPÉ—A PERSIAN MILITARY CAMP.

Persians and Turcomans—Mutual opinion—Persian fortified villages—Jungle—Depredations of wild boars—Former cultivation—Possibilities of irrigation—*Turbé*, or saint's tomb—Persian entrenched camp of *Ak Imam*—The Kara-Su—Ancient bridge—Inferior Persian armament and uniforms—Conversation of Mustapha Khan about Tekkés—Description of former—Veli Khan and his Mirza—Camp music and *muezzins*—Persian physician—Mediæval ideas—Absurd conversations—Position of Australia—Afghan troopers—Il Geldi Khan—Dangers in jungle—Tea, water-pipes, and chess—Interfluvial zone—General insecurity—Turcomans' opinion about Geok Tepé—Giurgen river—Arrival at Gumush Tepé.

BANISHED from the camp at Tchikislar, I had come to Asterabad in order to be within reach of the Russian columns, and to have it in my power to know what was happening from time to time at the former place. Various rumours of unusual activity on the part of the Tekké Turcomans reached me, and though, owing to the hospitality of Mr. Churchill, I was exceedingly comfortable at Asterabad, I resolved to move out into the plain between the Atterek and Sumbar rivers as far as Gumush Tepé, a point which would afford me many facilities for ascertaining what was occurring within the Russian lines. Travelling over the intermediate country was rather a ticklish undertaking, in consequence of the near proximity of Tekké raiders, who pushed boldly forward towards the sea-board, and of the never over-scrupulous parties of Turcomans of various tribes, camped and wandering, between the Atterek and the Giurgen.

It was an hour after sunrise as I rode through the bazaar on my way to the northern town gate. Early as was the hour, every one was astir and about his daily business, for the Persians are not morning sleepers, though they make up for their rising betimes by abandoning work at two or three in the afternoon, after which hour the bazaar is deserted and silent. Outside the gate, watering their horses at the stream which flows out of the town by a subterranean issue under the wall, were some dozens of Persians and Turcomans, all armed to the teeth, and evidently not over-confident in each other. At a distance of a mile out in the plain they would be far from associating so closely. Even the Persian soldiers have an exceeding dread of the denizens of the *kibitkas* along the Giurgen. A Persian officer, who was evidently above the ordinary prejudices of his class, once said to me that with equal forces the Turcomans were always perfectly certain of victory when fighting with the soldiers of the Shah. The Turcomans are far from having so mean an opinion of themselves as this officer entertained of his comrades-in-arms. I once heard a Yamud Turcoman aver, in the most serious and evidently sincere tone, that any one of his race was a match in battle for nine Persians, a statement which, in view of some astonishing facts which have come under my notice, did not seem so exceedingly incredible; though I was forced to doubt one of the portions of his argument—viz. that one Turcoman could be counted upon as equal to three Russians, while one of the latter would be sure to come off victorious in an encounter with three Persians.

The old earth-brick wall and crumbling towers were picturesque and mellow-tinted in the early sun rays, and the jungles of stunted oak, pomegranate, and reed were bright with late autumnal colours; for around Asterabad, winter, properly speaking, had not then set in. Half a mile from

the town the irregular causeway merged into a foot-path twelve inches wide, formed by the passage of men, horses, and camels through the bamboo-like reeds which, with their plumy tufts, rose to a height of fifteen feet on either side. At intervals, through occasional openings in the jungle, glimpses were caught of far distant stretches of the vast Steppe, deep azure, with golden morning streakings; and here and there a slender, sombre line of trees marked the course of the Giurgen and its tributaries. Scattered amid the dense growth of briar and reed, and five or six hundred yards apart, were numerous Persian villages of from twenty to thirty houses each. The character of these villages is entirely different from that of the Turcoman *aoulls* or *ova*s to be met with five or six miles further on in the open, and which, with rare exceptions, have no kind of defence around the groups of circular felt huts, or *aladjaks*, the inhabitants trusting entirely, in case of an attack, to their personal prowess on horseback. The Persian villages, on the contrary, are surrounded by loop-holed walls of mud, from twelve to fifteen feet high, strengthened with rude flanking towers and a fosse. The houses are oblong structures of mud, the high sloping roofs of reed-thatch being supported upon a tangled maze of branches, and projecting into wide rough eaves. The edifice bears considerable resemblance to a dilapidated crow's nest. Close beside each dwelling, within a rough courtyard, were a couple of sleeping stages, each consisting of a platform raised on four poles to a height of ten or twelve feet from the ground, and having a sloping roof of reed. Here the inhabitants, during the sultry summer months, take their nightly sleep. The entire aspect of these villages, with their primitive fortifications and guarded gateway, spoke eloquently of the general insecurity pervading the district, and of the justly founded fears of the population. Notwithstanding all the efforts of

the Russian and Persian Governments, persons of both sexes are occasionally carried into captivity by the neighbouring nomads, and murderous affrays between Persians and Turcomans are of everyday occurrence in the immediate vicinity of Asterabad. Deep, miry irrigation canals are met with at every hundred paces, crossed by rude, rickety constructions of wood and earth, inconvenient at all times, and dangerous to the belated traveller overtaken by evening in these swampy jungles, removed but one step from their primæval state. The little cultivation that exists in this direction is mainly of rice and a species of oats. The fields are enclosed by earth banks and briar hedges, intended to prevent the depredations of the wild boars, which swarm in the neighbourhood. Hundreds of these animals are annually killed by the peasantry. Their flesh is left a prey to jackals and lynxes, who make short work of each carcass. The heads and skins are suspended from the branches of trees, with the idea that they will intimidate the surviving animals. On many trees I have seen from ten to twelve thus suspended, and in one instance twenty-two.

Following the road in a north-westerly direction for three or four miles, the jungle and reeds began to give place to wide tracts of open country, covered with luxuriant grass. To the left towered the huge ridges of the Elburz mountains, now all capped with snow, their slopes and the plain bordering their bases densely covered with forest growth. To the right stretched the boundless expanse of the great salt steppes, growing drearier and more desolate with every pace to the northward. Nothing could be more striking than the sudden transition from the redundantly luxuriant vegetation around Asterabad and along the hill slopes to the horrid barrenness of plain across which lies the road to Tchikislar. The source of this unmitigated desolation

seems to me to be the almost absolute levelness of the plain. At least it gives no path for streams of ordinary dimensions. On the melting of the Elburz snows great torrents tear their way across it, reaching the Giurgen. A portion of the water stagnates in great marshes, which dry up on the commencement of the natural heats; but regular natural irrigation there is none, and a naturally fertile territory is thus blighted beside a plentiful water supply. Wherever artificial irrigation has been brought to bear, the desert springs into life; and to judge from the traces of large channels which I repeatedly crossed, this border district must have been once in a high state of cultivation. Many systems have been proposed to facilitate irrigation—among the rest to build vast dams across the mouths of some of the great Elburz gorges opening to the northward. The water of the melting snows would thus be retained, forming great supplies which could at need be led away across the plain, instead of tearing a destructive path for themselves in the early summer days. However, it is idle to speak of such enterprises when many others, infinitely more easy to accomplish, remain unthought of and unattempted in this home of neglect.

Apart from the great three-terraced sepulchral mounds which dot the plain, the only prominent object is a large domed *turbé*, or tomb, of some local saint, believed by the inhabitants to be that of a nephew of Hussein, one of the heroes of the Persian religious plays. As far as the eye can reach, Turcoman villages of forty or fifty huts each are scattered over the plain, and numerous herds of cattle tended by nomads, armed and on horseback, are continually met with. A four hours' ride from Asterabad brought me to a Persian entrenched camp of about fifteen hundred men, consisting of two infantry regiments and one of cavalry, who accompanied the Governor of Asterabad, Mustapha Khan, in his

tour for collecting the annual tribute from the Turcomans. At this season the latter migrate into Persian territory to obtain winter forage for their flocks. In the present instance, the threatened hostility of the Tekkés against all those tribes which had in any way aided the Russian advance along the Atterek had greatly increased the usual migration. The Persian camp of Ak-Imam was situated in the midst of a plain, here and there dotted with patches of forest growth, offshoots of the great woods. Along the hills close by runs a sluggish stream, the Kara-Su, one of the southern tributaries of the Giurgen. All around are marshes of a most unhealthy character, filling the air with pestilent malaria. A massive red-brick bridge of three arches, half concealed in the great cane-brakes, spans the muddy stream. It is now entirely unused. Not a trace of a road exists at either extremity, both of which debouch upon jungle and marsh. It was evidently one of those bridges over which passed the great causeway of Shah Abass, leading to Gez and the South Caspian coast.

The Persian camp consisted partly of tents, some square, some bell-shaped; and of shelter huts constructed of sheaves of reeds ingeniously put together. It was surrounded by a rampart mounting two field batteries, the greater number of the pieces being old smooth-bore bronze guns. There were three or four bronze rifled twelve-pounders. The troops were armed with a long smooth-bore musket, bearing date from the 'Fabrique Royale de Saint Etienne, 1816,' not long previously converted from flint-lock to percussion. The physique of the men seemed fairly good, although, probably owing to the malaria of the marshes, they did not appear to be in good condition. During the cold December nights, also, their uniforms were miserably deficient, composed as they were of blue calico tunics and trousers, the former faced with red; a sheepskin shako, and canvas

sandals of no particular pattern. They have, as a rule, no overcoats, a poor kind of blanket being the only extra clothing—if I can give it that name. I had an interview with Mustapha Khan, the commander of the camp and Governor of Asterabad. We had some conversation about the Tekkés. He had, he told me, been engaged in many combats with these latter, and found them to be remarkably good soldiers--that is, as cavalry. Their infantry, he said, he had had but little to do with. They only fought when their homes were attacked, as was the case at Geok Tepé (Yengi Sheher) when Lomakin attacked them. Tekkés, unless well mounted, never ventured any distance from home. This implied that the speaker had never got close to the Tekké centres. For the reason he gave, he didn't believe that Noor Berdi Khan, the then commander at Geok Tepé, had so many infantry with him at Bendessen as was currently reported. He even doubted if he had any. The fifteen thousand cavalry and eighteen guns he could understand. The guns could only be regarded as position guns, intended altogether for defensive action. They would never be trusted within reach of the Cossacks. The cavalry would be, no doubt, very efficient in cutting off convoys. This was their *forte*. He believed the Russians would have hard work even to reach Merv, without speaking of establishing themselves there, which was nigh impossible until the Caspian settlements were much better organised, and railway and other communications from the West established. The General's ideas coincided very much with those I had previously heard expressed by Russian officers of superior grade. After the usual Persian glass of very strong black tea, I took leave of the Commander-in-Chief, and went to present a letter of introduction to Veli Khan, commanding the infantry. The Commander-in-Chief was an old-fashioned Persian, who wore the usual semi-bedgown sort of costume,

and stained his beard and finger-nails red with *henna*. The brigade commander, on the contrary, was semi-European in his garb, and, to my intense delight, spoke a little French. His secretary, Mirza Abdurrahim, spoke the language with fair fluency. It was close on sunset when I reached Veli Khan's tent, consisting of two pavilions separated by a space enclosed at each side by a canvas wall. The band was performing on some kind of clarionet-like pipes, and what seemed to me muffled drums. The smothered kind of music produced seemed as if issuing from under a feather-bed. Then the evening gun thundered out; and a wild flourish of trumpets was executed, after which, the chaunt of various *muezzims* rose on the evening air. The chief of them appeared to be of advanced age, as well as I could judge from his quavering notes. They reminded me irresistibly of the efforts of a belated Bacchanalian endeavouring to reproduce some very sentimental ditty in an exquisitely pathetic fashion—and completely failing. I presented my letter of introduction, and give the following as a specimen of an interview with a Persian dignitary. After some conversation on general topics, the Khan told me that he had badly sprained his ankle some time before, and asked me if I could prescribe for him. In the East all Europeans are supposed to be deeply versed in the healing art. I recommended a bandage moistened with cold water and vinegar, and cold water poured from a height on the ailing joint every morning. 'We have an excellent surgeon attached to the brigade,' said the General, when I had done speaking. 'Then,' said I to myself, 'why do you consult me?' 'He is coming directly,' said the General; 'he will be glad to see you.' Shortly after, a tall, handsome, intellectual-looking man, with coal-black beard and piercing eyes, made his appearance. He was the surgeon. A conversation about Euro-

pean politics followed. After a pause, the subject of the sprained ankle again came up. I repeated my prescription. 'On what scientific grounds do you base your remedy?' said the doctor. I explained. 'What would you say to a dozen leeches? asked the *hakim*. Glad to get out of the subject, I said that the remedy was excellent. Not at all. No chance of getting off so easily. 'I presume you are an astronomer?' went on my interlocutor. 'Well,' I said, not exactly understanding the sudden transition from sprained ankles and leeches to the stars, 'I know something about the science.' 'I presume you can foretell a favourable conjunction for the application of the leeches, and drawing the blood of his Excellency?' My gravity was put to a severe test; but taking a long pull at a water pipe, or *kalioun*, which having gone the round of the company was in turn handed to me, I uttered the usual prolonged sigh after such an indulgence, and gasped out between suppressed laughing and half-suffocation that I regretted my science was not of so profound a nature. Upon this the hakim, casting a triumphant glance around, sank back upon his heels and fingered his chaplet of amber beads. He felt that he had completely floored me, and need not say more in order to show up my utter ignorance of medical science. I, for one, blessed the stars that had rescued me from the chirurgico-astronomical discussion. The hospitality I met with was without bounds; so great and so minute in its details as to be embarrassing, but interspersed by singular questions which made me doubt my own sanity or that of my questioners. One gentleman wished to know what was the thickness and height of the walls of the Palace of Crystal which he had been told existed in London. Another desired to be informed whether all Franks wore long boots like mine, and whether I took them off when I went to bed. When just on the point of

going to sleep on my bamboo couch, a young officer begged for some instruction in the French language; and subsequently growing enthusiastic on the subject, asked me to dictate to him a love-letter to his sweetheart in that language. I explained that I was not sufficiently acquainted with Eastern phraseology to take the initiative, and asked for a specimen, so that I might gauge the nature of the desired epistle. Hereupon my companion favoured me with some sentences, so replete with *buhlbuls*, roses, gazelles, and other agreeable animals and plants, that a Franco-Persian lexicon of natural history would have been absolutely requisite in order that I might do justice to his effusion.

Another example of the oddity of Persian ideas. I happened, in the course of conversation, to mention Australia. The General turned to his secretary, and asked where that country was. The secretary hesitated for a moment, but immediately said that he was not sure whether it was in the Sea of Marmora or that of Azoff, but that he knew it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of America.

At daybreak next morning I was summoned to the tent of the Commander-in-Chief, who told me that in case I thought of starting that day for Gumush Tepé I could take advantage of the departure of a Turcoman Khan who was going in that direction. Some Afghan troopers would also accompany me. I have already alluded to these Afghans —all of them Sunnite Mahometans, who constitute the main strength of the Persian cavalry in the northern provinces. They are the descendants of the colony planted along the border by Nadir Shah after his return from his expedition to Afghanistan. The Turcoman chief, by name Il Geldi Khan, a sly-looking man of some thirty-five years of age, agreed that I should accompany him. He could not for

the life of him make out what I wanted prowling about in the desert. He had a vague idea that I might belong to some order of dervishes in my own country; but the notion which found most favour with him was that I had been sent by the Padishah to take stock of his villages and camels with a view to taxing them later on. This latter idea had its origin in the widely-spread rumour prevailing here, about the proximate occupation of Herat by English troops, and their possible march in this direction. At one of the Khan's villages, about two hours' ride from the camp, we dismissed the Afghan escort, my conductor offering to supply another of his own clansmen, for though both the Persians and the Turcomans are nominally living under the jurisdiction of the same sovereign, they take every opportunity of harming each other. No single Turcoman will venture into the pomegranate jungles, amid which are situated the fortified Persian villages which constitute the suburbs of Asterabad. To do so would be to incur almost certain death, for these outlying Persians invariably go about armed and in groups, and never lose an opportunity of 'potting' a nomad, and *vice versâ*. Such events are of almost daily occurrence in the neighbourhood to which I allude. While waiting the preparation of some *pilaff*, I had an opportunity of witnessing some of the Turcoman indoor amusements indulged in during the long winter period of inaction following the gathering of the harvest. They spend much of their time drinking scalding hot water, faintly flavoured with tea; but when they cannot possibly swallow any more, and have passed the water-pipe round sufficiently often, they engage in a kind of game of odd and even, played with the knuckle-bones of a sheep's foot, some of the pieces being stained red. The elders occasionally play chess, usually on a cotton handkerchief divided into squares by lines of black stitching. The squares are all of the same colour. The

chessmen are of the most primitive pattern. The top of a cow's horn does duty as king; a similar article of smaller size as *vizir*, or queen. The knights are represented by upright pieces of bone, each having two notches. The bishop, or, as the Turcomans term it, *fil*, or elephant, is a piece of something in any shape; while the castles, or *rokhs*, have the form of mushrooms. The game is the same as in Europe, with some difference in the method of castling, and division of the first two-square moves of each pawn into two, two pawns being simultaneously moved forward one square each. They play very fairly, and even in the midst of the game make the moves with the most amazing rapidity. The spectators enter into the spirit of the game with the greatest enthusiasm, chattering and squabbling over the relative merits of the different moves.

This inter-fluvial zone was debatable ground, over which one could not move with any guarantee of security. The Yamud Turcomans were on the *qui vive* about the Tekkés, who had cut the telegraph line between Tchikislar and Asterabad, and strangers were on their guard against Turcomans of every description. As a rule I found the present generation of Yamuds an honest, hospitable people, ready to do a great deal, even for a Kaffir and Ferenghi like myself. The older members, who had been influential slave-merchants, and whose worldly wealth had been drawn mainly from traffic in Persian captives, were content to fall in with the new state of affairs, and allow a stranger to pass freely. Still, even these latter, reformed though they were, warned me against certain groups of their own nationality inhabiting the vicinity of Asterabad. I was counselled never to show that I had any sum of money about me, and, when saluted on the road by the usual 'Where are you going?' to give a reply calculated to mislead my questioners if I wished to sleep securely that even-

ing. This feeling of insecurity was everywhere pre-eminent. A dish of *pilaff*, as in this instance, is laid among the folded legs of the community. The host, before touching the food, exclaims *Selam aleik*, 'Peace be with you,' and until the same salutation is returned, hands are not dipped in the dish. In the case to which I now refer, it was not a religious or habitual practice only, but, as it were, the challenge and reply of the sentry and patrol. Nine splendidly mounted horsemen, each armed with sabre and musket, accompanied me on my way to the coast. They were friends upon whom I could rely, for we had eaten together, the challenge of *Selam aleik* being somewhat similar to the American one at an hotel bar, 'Will you drink or fight?'

Owing to one of my horses having become sore-backed, I had to pay six francs for an extra one for baggage; for here, however willingly a feed of rice may be given you gratis, corn, hay, and horses have to be most religiously paid for. As we rode over the plains covered with short, withered grass, I talked with my host about the battle of Geok Tepé—the green hill or fort—where the Russians met with their serious check. He insisted that the Russian loss was tremendous, and that two guns had been taken. He seemed to think that the Russians had been disposed of for at least five years to come, and that their ultimate success was impossible so far as Merv was concerned. Of course his notions about the Russian losses in the battle were formed on an Eastern scale of exaggeration. He could scarcely understand my reasoning when I told him that when only two thousand troops were engaged, the losses could not be what he estimated them. From his conversation I learned that the Turcomans, too, considered the Russian advance in the direction of Merv as finished for the next four or five years. I could not agree with him in

that; but I felt tolerably sure that the Russians would next time appear in much more formidable numbers than on the past occasion. During the expedition against the Tekké, as during the campaign in Armenia, the Russians sadly underrated the power of their adversaries. In each case a tremendous check was the result—in Armenia at Zevin, in Turkestan at Geok Tepé. In Armenia the Russian laurels were retrieved at the Aladja Dagh and Kars; in Turkestan it was at Yengi Sheher and Askabad.

It is impossible to be aware of the presence of the Giurgen River till one is within fifty yards of the bank, so flat is the plain, and so clear cut the deep river bed. For a quarter of an hour we searched for a passage, and at length forded the river, our horses almost swimming—that is to say, swimming were it not for the weight of their riders. Another two hours' ride through swamp and prairie brought us to Gumush Tepé.

## CHAPTER XII.

### GUMUSH TEPÉ.

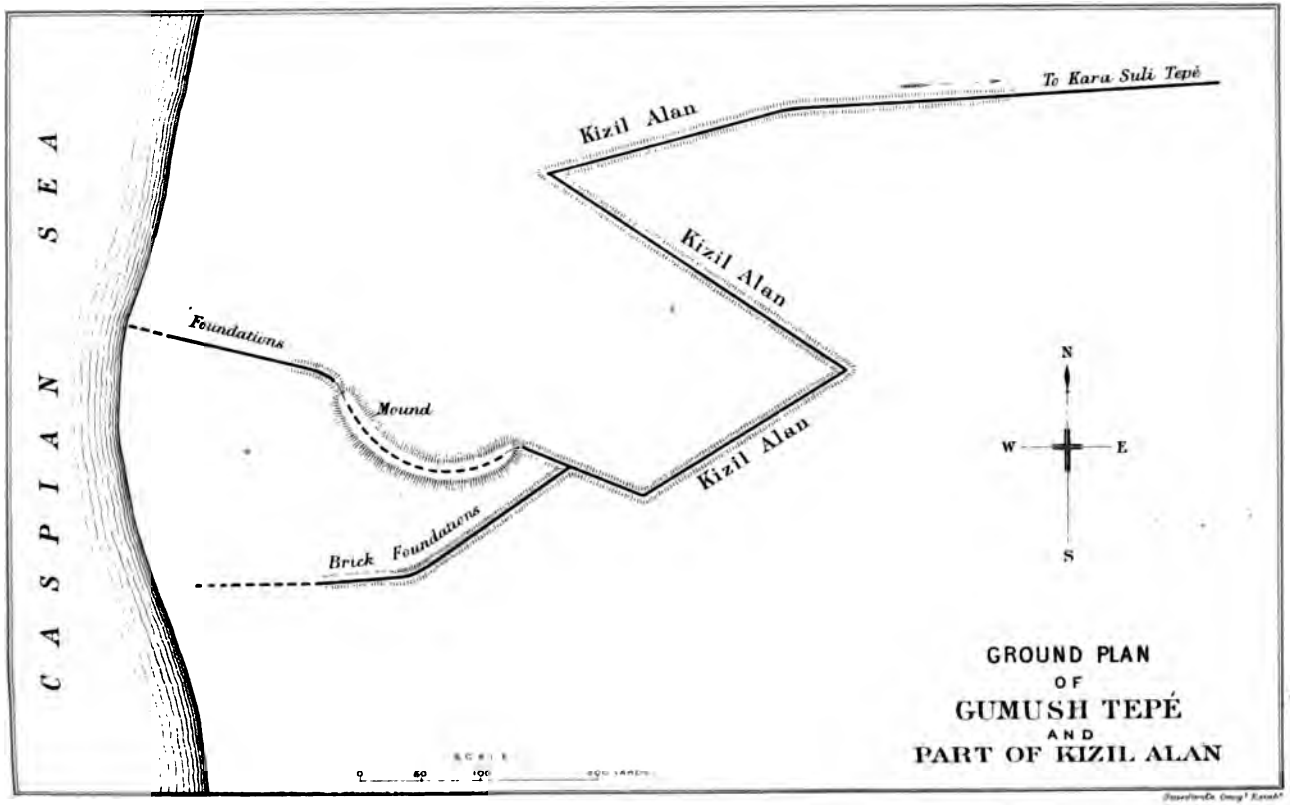
Maritime Turcomans—Luggers—Dug-out canoes—Permanent Turcoman settlements—Gumush Tepé mound—Old town of Khorsib—Kizil Alan—Old earth mounds—Alexander's wall—Former palm groves—Geldi Khan—Turcoman interior—Female costume—Children's silver-mounted caps—Turcoman toilet—Occupations and dietary of Turcomans—Tea drinking—Economy of sugar—Absence of animal food—Fuel—Astatki lamps—Tcheliken salt—Yaghourt—Visit to Tchikislar—Salt plains—A rebuff—Every-day life at Gumush Tepé—Makeshifts against rain—The *tenkis*—Precautions against storm—A rush for water.

THE village, or *aoull*, of Gumush Tepé is one of the very few permanent Turcoman settlements which exist along the Eastern Caspian shore. It is situated within about two miles and a half of the mouth of the Giurgen river, and consists in ordinary times of six hundred to eight hundred *kibitkas*. The resident population occupy themselves almost entirely in fishing, though no inconsiderable portion of their animal food is supplied by the vast flocks of sea-birds which are to be found in their immediate vicinity, at the capture and killing of which they are very expert. Owing to Gumush Tepé being within easy reach of the forests bordering upon Kenar Gez, 'the port of Asterabad,' as it is styled, though it is nigh thirty miles distant from that city, and of the other wooded tracts immediately south of the same place, it is one of the principal points from which the wooden frames of the Turcoman houses of the interior are supplied. At the village itself, and from a point three miles above it, the river Giurgen is at all seasons unford-

able. On the left bank of the river, and at its mouth, are some very considerable Armenian fishing stations, where the *sefid mahee*, or large Caspian carp, are caught in enormous numbers, dried, and sent off to different parts of Russia. Caviare, also, forms a considerable portion of the products of these establishments. At Gumush Tepé the river is about eighty yards wide, the Turcomans inhabiting both banks, but principally the northern one. The fishing-boats of the population number from seventy to a hundred, and lie at anchor at the rude landing stages of rough piles and reed fascines which enable them to discharge their cargoes. These craft, now exclusively employed for fishing purposes, and, when I saw them, for the transport of wood, fuel, and forage to the Russian camp at Tchikislar, were formerly largely devoted to piracy, and to Turcoman descents upon the Persian coast. They are of two kinds. The *keseboy* is a lugger of some forty feet in length, is decked fore and aft, and has two masts, carrying large lateen sails. The *kayuk*, or *lodka*, as the Russians call it, is a craft somewhat smaller in dimensions, decked only at the forecastle, and having usually but one mast, though in some cases it possesses a very small second one at the stern. There is also the *täimul*, which is simply a dug-out canoe, formed of a single tree-trunk, flat bottomed, not more than two feet wide, and vertical sided. These latter, however, are scarcely ever used except for the service of the larger boats, or for expeditions up and down the river, or ferrying purposes.

Besides Gumush Tepé there are at present but three permanent Turcoman stations on the East Caspian coast. These are Hassan Kouli, the *aoull* close to the camp at Tchikislar, which I have already described in some detail, and another in the vicinity of Krasnavodsk, or Shah Quaddam (the footprint of the king), as it was called before the

descent of the Russians. The houses composing Gumush Tepé have no pretension to arrangement in streets; they are scattered indiscriminately over the area occupied by the village, and are, with few exceptions, the regular dome-shaped, felt-covered residences which are to be met with all over Central Asia. A few wooden houses raised upon poles, copied from the Armenian fishing-sheds, were also to be found, and half-a-dozen rude buildings of brick, the materials for which had been taken from the ancient remains lying about two miles to the northward. The *aoull* itself is called after these latter, which form to-day only a long earthen mound from twenty to thirty feet in height and about one hundred yards in length, the surface and base being strewn with large flat bricks some fourteen inches long by twelve in depth and four in thickness, of a brownish yellow colour, and as hard as iron. The name Gumush Tepé, by which this hill is known, is derived from the fact that considerable quantities of silver money have been discovered there from time to time, and that such coins are still found there after heavy rainfalls, or when graves are dug for the dead of the neighbouring village. I am credibly informed by both Turcomans and Russians that large numbers of these pieces bear the impress of the head of Alexander the Great—'the Iskander Zulkarnein,' or two-horned Alexander—the name by which the great Macedonian is known amongst all Eastern peoples. This mound has been used for ages by the nomads as a burying-place, as for this purpose they select the highest point of ground within any available distance of them; and the excavations made in digging graves have done much to destroy its ancient contour, and to obliterate any intelligible remnants of the structures which indubitably existed upon its summit. Turcoman tradition speaks of an ancient brick-built town which formerly occupied this mound and its environs, and which


CASPIAN SEA
To Kara Suli Tepé
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GUMUSH TEPÉ
AND
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is said to have borne the name of Khorsib. Along the ridge of the hill of Gumush Tepé, the plan of which is that of a quarter of a circle, run the foundations of a brick wall, nearly three feet in thickness, and continued from its western end. These foundations follow the level ground, and disappear under the surface of the Caspian, the waters of which, at ordinary times, are distant some two hundred yards from the extremity of the hill. I say sometimes, for when a wind from the west prevails the water advances at least half this distance inland. From the eastern end of the hill the foundations stretch in a straight line to the south-east for at least a hundred yards, when they again turn, in a more or less north-easterly direction, for a distance of two hundred yards, then changing abruptly to the north-west for more than three hundred yards, and again in a due easterly direction, reaching far away into the plain, where they join the Kara Suli Tepé, an enormous mound, also covered with scattered baked brick, and presenting ample evidence of having once been strongly revetted and otherwise fortified. About fifty yards from where this wall leaves the eastern extremity of the hill branches out in a south-westerly direction another line of foundations, which also runs to the water's edge. This latter, as well as that from the western extremity of Gumush Tepé, seems to have constituted some kind of landing pier, which enabled craft to discharge their cargoes despite what must at all times have been a very limited depth of water. The bricks scattered far and wide around the hill and along the walls are in many instances water-worn and rounded, and are mixed with large quantities of broken pottery, sometimes roughly enamelled blue, and fragments of glass, the surface of which presents the prismatic colouring of weather-worn silicates. These foundations are named by the Turcomans the Kizil Alan, or red road, as they maintain that they do not represent a

wall, but simply a narrow causeway, by which the swampy grounds, formerly lying to the east of the mound, were traversed. In fact, old men told me that less than half a century ago the mound of Gumush Tepé was entirely surrounded by water, and my host at the *aoull* at the mouth of the Giurgen informed me that thirty years previously the site of the village was submerged. That was considerably within his own memory, as he was between sixty and seventy years of age. This Kizil Alan can be traced in an easterly direction, running along, in a zigzag fashion, the slightly raised and almost imperceptible water-shed which separates the Giurgen and Atterek rivers, and connects the numerous earth-mounds or *tepés* which, occurring at intervals of from one to two miles, dot the interfluvial plain and reach away to the town of Budjnoord, not far from Kuchan. These mounds, with the connecting wall-foundations, or whatever they are, are known to the Persians and Turcomans by the name of Alexander's Wall, and form a triple line of entrenchments, the mounds of one line alternating with those before and behind, and intervening between the wooded mountain slopes of the North Persian territory, and the vast plain reaching away to Khiva. One can place but little reliance upon these traditions, for the Easterns of these regions almost invariably attribute to Alexander any works of considerable magnitude whose origin is lost in the night of time. They just as probably belong to periods of various dynasties of early Persian monarchs, and the mounds themselves may very likely have been the sites of villages in the times when these plains were inhabited and cultivated; for exactly similar ones are to be seen to-day along the north of Persia, covered with inhabited houses, and their brows surrounded by entrenchments. *A propos* of the ancient cultivation of this plain, it seems to be clearly indicated by the traces of

old irrigation trenches of considerable dimensions. The people of Asterabad say that two centuries ago the ground between the mountains and the Giurgen was one vast grove of palm trees. Of course I give all these traditions for what they are worth, and just as I heard them from the inhabitants. The names of the principal mounds, as we proceed from Gumush Tepé along the Giurgen in the direction of Asterabad, are the two Kara Suli Tepés, greater and lesser, Carga Tepé to the right, Sigur Tepé to the left, the Altoun-tokmok, lying a long way due east, the Aser Shyia far off to the south-east, and the Giurgen Tepé south of the usual ford across the river. There are scores of other *tepés* within view of any one of them, but I do not consider their names of any philological or historical importance, as they are comparatively modern ones, applied to them by the Turcomans, and merely explanatory of some peculiarity in form, or having reference to their relations to certain water-courses. In view of the large amount of brick scattered around Gumush Tepé itself, along the course of the Kizil Alan, and on the flanks of the different *tepés*, one is led to the irresistible conclusion that considerable buildings formerly existed in this locality, and that these buildings have been destroyed, partly by domestic influences, partly during the marches of Eastern conquerors of old, and doubtless to a very large extent to supply building materials for neighbouring Persian towns.

Immediately on arriving at the village of Gumush Tepé the chief who escorted me brought me to the house of his father, Geldi Khan, who seemed to be patriarch of the entire district. He was over sixty years of age, with refined aquiline features, cold grey eye, a long white moustache and chin tuft, there being no sign of beard upon the upper portion of his jaws. Seated around him, in different parts of the *aladjak*, were the female members of his family, all

occupied in domestic work, such as spinning, weaving, and cooking. The Khan told me that he had been three months in Teheran as the guest of the Shah, with whom, he said, he was on very good terms. He had three sons, the eldest of whom, Il Geldi, had escorted me across from the Persian camp; the second was known by the name of Moullah Killidge. This latter was a student of theology, and by courtesy had the title of Moullah conceded to him; in fact, the same dignity is accorded to anyone in these parts who is able to read and write. In other Turkish countries he would be simply styled Khodjah. The third son, a youth of fourteen or fifteen, superintended the grazing of his father's flocks and herds. An old Turcoman named Dourdi was told off to provide me with lodgings in his *kibitka*. He was the immediate henchman of the old Khan, from whom he rented his house. In villages like this the chief generally owns a large number of dwellings, which he lets for small annual rents to his followers. The *kibitka* which I was to share with Dourdi was but poorly furnished, even for a Turcoman hut. As usual, in the centre of the floor was the fire, the smoke from which escaped by the circular opening in the centre of the roof, or by the door, when owing to bad weather this central aperture was closed with its hood of felt. A small and battered brass *samovar* stood near the fire; beyond it, on the side farthest from the doorway, the floor was carpeted with thick felt, upon which were laid, as seats for people of more than ordinary rank, smaller sheets of the same material, and of brighter colours. Around the room, to the height of four feet, were horizontally piled a large number of stout tree-branches, sawn into convenient lengths, and intended for the winter supply of fuel. This wood was kept within proper limits by vertical stakes, stuck into the ground outside the heap, the top of which was used as a kind of rude shelf or counter upon which bolsters,

quilts, and other sleeping appurtenances, were piled, these being, indeed, with the exception of the carpets, large and small, and a rude horizontal stone corn-mill, the only articles of furniture which the house contained. An old Russian musket, bearing upon the lock-plate the date 1851, but having of late years evidently been supplied with a percussion lock, hung, together with a sabre and a large chaplet of brown stone beads, against the lattice-work of the habitation. This combination of musket, sword, and beads, seemed at the time to be no inapt embodiment of Turcoman ideas, or, for that matter, of Osmanli ones either. Beside the fire crouched an elderly crone, who, whatever she might have been in her youth, was now the very incarnation of female ugliness. She was engaged in preparing the evening meal, and seemed not in the least disturbed by my entry. I may here add that, with the exception of very recently married ladies, no Turcoman woman makes even a pretence of veiling her features. It is not usual, either, for a Turcoman to have more than one wife, the fact being that most Turcomans find it difficult to provide what they consider a sufficiency of food, and do not care to have any extra mouths in their *aladjaks*. The majority of the women at Gumush Tepé wore the characteristic female attire of these countries—a pair of trousers fastening closely round the ankle; over these a long shirt of some dark red or purple material, the breast of which, in many cases, was ornamented with coins and pieces of silver hung in horizontal rows. At Gumush Tepé it was principally the young girls and newly-married women who affected much personal adornment, the near contact of the Jaffar Bai Turcomans of the place with the Russians at Tchikislar, and with the Persians at Asterabad, having made the elders of the community appreciate the value of silver and gold coins as a medium of exchange as too great for them to be allowed to lie idle for

purposes of mere bodily ornamentation. The further one advances to the eastward the less the value of money is understood, and the more plentifully do the ladies decorate themselves with it. On state occasions, however, the Yamud women wear ponderous collars of hammered silver, embellished with flat cornelians and lozenge-shaped panels of embossed gold, and on their heads a hideous-looking hat of the size and shape of an ordinary bandbox, the front of which is hung over with festoons of small coins. Hung over the back of this absurd head-dress, and reaching to the small of the back, is a long-sleeved coat of crimson, blue, or green, a smaller one, fitting closely to the waist, being worn over the red shirt. This is the gala costume of the ordinary classes. The wives of chiefs and of the richer villagers wear on all occasions the full quantity of clothing and ornaments, with the exception of the hat. This is then replaced by a large red handkerchief, tied turban-wise around the head, one end falling along the back. I have already described the costume of the male Yamuds, when speaking of Tchikislar and Hassan Kouli. The children, even in the severest weather, are very scantily clothed indeed, their entire costume consisting of a short red shirt which scarcely reaches to the knees. The head is covered with a little skull-cap of the same colour, around which are generally hung five or six pieces of silver money, the top being surmounted by a small silver tube, rising from a hemispherical base. This appendage to the head-dress of children is common to both sexes up to a certain age, and seems to bear some resemblance in symbolism to the Roman *bulla*, just as donning the huge black sheepskin hat seems equivalent to investment with the *toga virilis*. It is a remarkable fact that though Turcomans are notoriously given to thieving, these children's hats, each with its eight or ten shillings' worth of appended coins and ornaments, are

hardly ever purloined, though the wearers fling them at each other in the most careless manner. I have seen half-a-dozen of them lying about without any owners being in sight. Sometimes, however, they go astray, and on such occasions the individual who volunteers to act as village crier walks among the *kibitkas*, proclaiming in a loud voice that the hat of So-and-so's child has been mislaid, and requesting the finder to bring it to a certain *kibitka*. I enquired of my host whether theft of this kind was usual, but he said that it was rare indeed that the missing article was not returned intact.

The mode of life of the Turcomans along the Caspian is sufficiently active. Fully two hours before sunrise they were awake and about, and, by the light of the smoky *astatki* lamps, the women were to be seen grinding, by the rude hand-mill, the corn required for the morning's repast, while the men got ready their luggers and *täimuls* to proceed on their day's fishing, to convey loads of hay and other commodities to the Russian camp, or to seek firewood or timber for building purposes at Kenar Gez. A Turcoman's toilet is simplicity itself. I give Dourdi's as an example. Having donned the *kusgun* which served him during the night as a coverlet, he swept the carpet on which he had been sleeping with his huge sheepskin hat, which he then proceeded to dust by banging it lustily with the heavy iron tongues. Then, taking a piece of fat from the pot upon the hearth, he greased his boots with it, finishing up by washing his hands, using as soap the wood ashes from the fire. At the time of which I speak, the middle of December 1879, the Turcomans of Gumush Tepé supplied the Russian army at Tchikislar with a very large amount indeed of corn, rice, and fodder, and to a great extent facilitated the first stages of its march to Geok Tepé.

The dietary of an ordinary Turcoman is by no means

luxurious. Before the sun rises he partakes of some hot half-baked griddled bread, which has an intensely clayey taste and odour. This is washed down by weak black tea, and he thinks himself fortunate if he can now and then procure a piece of sugar wherewith to sweeten this draught. When he happens to meet with such a luxury, he adopts, with a view to economy, the Russian peasant's method of sweetening his tea. A small lump of sugar is held between the teeth, the tea being sucked through it. Several glasses are thus got through with an amount of sugar which would scarcely suffice for one glass taken by a Western European. While the Turcomans of the Caspian littoral and a hundred miles inland use only black tea, their more Eastern brethren constantly consume green. Should he be at home, his mid-day meal consists of *pilaff*, made of rice if he be in funds, or of brownish oatmeal if otherwise. The only usual accompaniment to this is a little grease or butter, boiled through the mass, or, as is more generally the case, some dried salt fish. Sometimes on *fête* days, dried plums and raisins are mixed with the *pilaff*. The evening meal, partaken of a little after sunset, is the best of the day, and for it is secured a small portion of mutton to accompany the *pilaff*, or a couple of wild ducks caught or shot by some male member of the family. While at Gumush Tepé I existed almost exclusively upon wild fowl of one kind or another—pheasants, partridges, and pin-tailed grouse—several of which I got boiled at once, keeping a number over to be eaten cold. Some of the ducks and geese are really excellent, but others are so fishy and rank as to render entirely inedible half a dozen good ones boiled in the same pot. The pelican and solan goose are greatly admired as food by the Turcomans, though I could not appreciate them. There was one thing about Turkestan which I could never understand, viz. the absence of flesh diet to an extent

that seemed unreasonable, considering the vast flocks and herds possessed by the inhabitants. I could readily understand their unwillingness to slaughter oxen or cows, as the former were employed in the tilling of their scanty fields, and from the latter were derived the milk, butter, and cheese, which they either consumed themselves or sold to the neighbouring Persians. It is true that from the sheep they derive the material for some portion of their garments, though most of their clothing is composed of cotton and camel-hair, but even so, the large flocks of sheep and goats which they possess would supply them more than twenty times over with abundance of textile fabrics. I know that during the progress of the Russians, sheep were largely bought up by the Commissariat of the expedition; but I have been in places where this was certainly not the case, inasmuch as the residents were hostile to the Muscovite advance.

The fuel used by these maritime Turcomans is generally wood brought from the neighbouring Persian coast, supplemented to a great extent by the dried dung of camels and other animals. The *kalioun*, or water pipe, is almost always ignited by means of a dried ball of horse's dung as large as a small-sized apple. This is carefully prepared beforehand, from the fresh material, piled in heaps in the sun, outside the house, and brought in by a dozen at a time. These balls catch fire like so much tinder; one is placed on the bowl containing the tobacco, and the smoking is commenced. The first pulls from the pipe, as can be easily imagined, possess a very peculiar flavour, owing to the mingled smoke of the fuel and the *tumbaki*.

At night, the interiors of the *kibitkas* are lighted by means of rude earth lamps, very much resembling small tea-pots, with exceedingly long and wide spouts. A bundle of cotton rag is stuffed into the spout, and, reaching to its

bottom, serves as a wick, the flame being fed by the black residual naphtha called by the Russians *astatki*. This, as I have already mentioned, is the residuum after distillation of the Baku petroleum. It produces a lurid red, smoky flame, five or six inches in height.

The salt, of which the Turcomans make large use both in cookery and for curing fish, is brought from the island of Tcheliken, in large blocks of two feet in length and eight or ten inches in thickness, quarried by the Turcomans of that island from the great striated layers which abound there. It exactly resembles, in colour and texture, the rock salt known in Europe.

One rarely sees milk used in its crude state among the Turcomans, as they seem to deem it unhealthy when so consumed. It is first boiled, and, when lukewarm, fermented. The resulting product is, when fresh, slightly sour, and becomes exceedingly so after the lapse of twenty-four hours. This is known to the Yamuds by the name of *yaghourt*; it is called by the Tekkés *gatthuk*, and by the Persians *mast*. It enters largely into the dietary of all three, and in hot weather is exceedingly refreshing and wholesome. The *panir*, or cheese, is simply *yaghourt* from which the serum has been drawn off, and which is allowed to strain and become more or less solidified in small bags suspended from the roof, a little salt being added to preserve it.

I had been but a few days at my new home when I learned that my friend Il Geldi Khan, who had escorted me from Ak Imam, was about to proceed over land to Tchikislar, and I resolved to go with him. We were accompanied by a dozen horsemen of his tribe, for it was rumoured that Tekkés who had fled from Geok Tepé were roving over the plain. We found an immense number of *kibitkas* in groups of from fifteen to twenty, scattered over the

plain some miles east of Gumush Tepé. They were those of Eastern Turcomans, who, terrified by the events occurring in the Akhal Tekké, had decided to move well within Persian territory. Refugees were continually arriving, bringing with them great numbers of camels, and we saw a cavalcade of Turcoman women, dressed in bright scarlet robes, and riding in curtained horse-litters, making the best of their way westwards, in the midst of their tribesmen and friends. Within ten miles of the top of the Atterek delta, the point at which we were to pass, we came upon a vast salt expanse. It was as white and even as a new snowfall, and I could only with difficulty bring myself to believe that it was not covered with snow. Long black tracks, produced by the passage of camels and horses, stretched away in every direction. Not a blade of any kind of herbage varied the monotony of this ghastly waste. During my subsequent wanderings in the plain, I never met with anything so remarkable as this salt expanse, for the existence of which I can only account by supposing that the waters of the Hassan Kouli lagoon, pressed forward by winds from the west, sometimes overflow the ground, and that the shallow waters, rapidly evaporated by the great heat of the sun, leave this deposit behind them. We stopped for the night at the Turcoman village of Atterek, to which I have had occasion to refer in describing my journey from Tchikislar to Asterabad. We were very hospitably received, a sheep being killed for our entertainment; and before daybreak next morning, after a breakfast of hot, greasy bread, and an immense quantity of sugarless tea, we pushed forward, reaching Tchikislar about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. My friend the Khan had formerly commanded a troop of irregular cavalry in the Russian service, composed of his own countrymen, but in consequence of some backsliding on his part in the matter of pay, given

to him for distribution among his command, he had been banished, and forbidden to return. Hence he was rather chary about making his appearance among the Russian lines—a hesitation which was apparently very well justified, for we had no sooner entered the camp than the chief of police marched up to us, and told my companion that the sooner he departed from its limits the better it would be for him. I fared no better, being warned that my presence was not desired, and we were both given until the morrow to retrace our steps. Seeing that there was little or no stir in the place, and that all military movements were for the moment at an end, I again took my way back by the road I had come, in company with Il Geldi and his following. We arrived at our starting-point without any new incident.

Finding that there was a constant intercourse between Gumush Tepé and Tchikislar, owing to the continued passing and repassing of luggers with hay and other supplies, and that Armenian dealers frequently passed through our village with a view of purchasing food at that place, to be sold by them at second hand to the encamped Russians, and that through their medium I might be constantly informed as to the movements of the troops, I resolved to make a lengthened stay with old Dourdi. Here, during a residence of some months, I had ample leisure for observing the manners and customs of the Yamud Turcomans, and as I shared the same one-chambered *kibitka* with my host, his wife, his niece, and a young child, and participated in their daily life, I had excellent opportunities for judging of Turcoman domestic life. There were certain inconveniences attendant upon this gregarious mode of existence, for the circular chamber was but fifteen feet in diameter, and some member of the family was always present. Consequently, when one wished to perform his ablutions, or to change his clothes, he was generally

obliged to do so in the dark, or under cover of his quilt, after the family had retired to rest. Our sole bed consisted of a thick felt carpet, spread upon the bare earth, our bolsters were of enormous dimensions, and our bed-covering was composed of a stuffed cotton quilt, and did not, I regret to say, bear the appearance of having often been washed. This, on very cold nights, I supplemented by my great sheepskin overcoat; but as a fire generally smouldered on the hearth, towards which our feet were directed, we passed the nights snugly enough. Still, as I have said, two hours before sunrise all further sleep became impossible by reason of the grinding of corn, the splitting of wood with a hatchet, the various goings to and fro of the household, and the stream of visitors who were sure to arrive at that hour.

These Turcoman *aladjaks* are, ordinarily, perfectly weather-proof, and, on the whole, fairly comfortable to live in, but that of my host was a rather patched and mended affair, and the light of day could be seen through more than one hole in the felt covering the exterior of its domed roof. One night, as we lay asleep, a tremendous downpour of rain set in, and after the first half-hour the water dripped into the hissing fire, and pattered around us on the quilts. Dourdi was equal to the occasion. It was clearly not the first time he had been confronted with the situation. He rose quickly, took a long iron-shod pole, which I presumed to be some kind of a boat-hook, and fixed one end of it in the side of the *aladjak* some five feet from the ground. The other end was supported by a loop of camel-hair rope, which descended from the centre of the roof to within the same distance from the ground. Hastily unfolding a carpet of large dimensions, he placed it over this horizontally rigged pole, the ends resting on the ground, and forming a kind of tent which contained all the sleepers. Often during my stay at Gumush Tepé, I have passed the night in this

house within a house. The loop of camel-hair rope is ordinarily intended as a support to one end of a cane, basket-like hammock, the other end of which is hung to the opposite side of the wall, the hammock serving as a cradle for young children.

The winter at Gumush Tepé is generally mild enough, and even during the severest portions of the year—towards the end of February—the snow rarely lies upon the ground for any length of time, except when drifted into old irrigation trenches, or where sheltered from the sun. To make up for this, however, about twice a month we had sudden and violent storms from the westward, of the approach of which we had generally only a quarter of an hour's warning, and at night none at all. This sudden storm is called the *tenkis*. The first time I witnessed one I was excessively puzzled to understand the movements of the inhabitants immediately before the storm struck the village. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon; the sun was shining brightly, and the sky was without a cloud. All at once I observed persons pointing hurriedly towards the distant Caspian horizon, where a thin, white, jagged line of flying mist was perceptible, which rose higher and higher at each moment, approaching us with rapid pace. In the village itself the wind was blowing from an opposite direction, and the mist clouds along the Elburz range were moving towards the west, while the advancing scud was still so very indistinct as to be unobservable by the unaccustomed eye. I saw men and women in frantic haste, flinging ropes over the tops of the *kibitkas*, and lashing the opposite extremities to stout wooden pegs firmly embedded in the ground close to the wall of the dwelling. In the meantime, within my residence, old Dourdi, muttering prayers in most anxious tones, was propping his boat-hook and several other poles of equal size against the spring of the dome, and planting the

lower one firmly in the ground. I could make neither head nor tail of all these preparations, and was still more confounded and amazed by seeing all the matrons and maidens of the community who were not engaged in securing the permanency of their habitations, rushing to the bank of the river, some carrying a pitcher in each hand, others with enormous single ones strapped upon their backs. These, with feverish haste, they filled with water, and, hurrying with them to their houses, again issued forth, with other vessels, for fresh supplies. My first idea was that these were defensive preparations against some expected raid on the part of the Tekkés; that the poles planted against the walls within were to resist some battering operations of the assailants; and that the water so eagerly sought for must be intended to extinguish a coming conflagration. Every one, however, was too busily engaged to give me any further answer to my demands as to what it all meant, than to exclaim, 'The *tenkis*! the *tenkis*!' By this time the jagged white mist had risen high above the horizon, and was rapidly veiling the western sky. Flocks of sea-gulls and other aquatic birds flew inland, screaming and shrieking loudly. Ere long I saw that the clouds along the mountain ceased their westward movement, staggered, reeled, and ultimately partook of the movement of the advancing scud. Great sand-clouds came whirling towards us from the beach, and in another instant the storm burst upon us, accompanied by a tremendous downpour of rain. The *kibitka* into which I rushed for shelter quivered and shook under its influence, and I thought that at each moment it would go over bodily. The westerly edge was lifted some inches from the ground with each fresh gust, and the eagerness with which ropes were hauled taut, and storm-props made fast by the inmates hanging with all their weight from their upper portions, reminded one of a scene on board a vessel at sea

during a violent tempest. I was gazing through a crevice in the felt walls out over the plain in an eastward direction, where some camels, laden with grass and hay, were hurrying forward to gain shelter before being overtaken in the open. I could see their loads seized upon by the storm gusts, and in a moment torn from the backs of the animals, and sent whirling far and wide, and to a height of a hundred feet. The camels turned tail to the wind and crouched down, stretching their long necks upon the earth, so as to remove themselves as much as possible from the influence of the hurricane and whirlwind, their conductors imitating them. This storm continued for over an hour, during which time the luggers moored in the river were quite deserted by their crews, lest the craft might be torn from their anchorage and dashed against each other, as occasionally happens. Of course when the tempest came on I saw the object of all the lashing down and propping up of the *kibitkas*, but it was only when it had passed, and the inhabitants were at leisure to speak to me, that I could make out the meaning of the hurried rush to the river for water. It appears that when the *tenkis* blows strongly, the sea-water is forced up the channel of the Giurgen, sometimes to a distance of a mile above the village, the natural flow of the stream being so impeded that when it is tolerably full, and its current is rapid, it overflows its banks. This forcing back of the sea-water into the river's channel renders the water of the river unfit for human consumption, often for hours together, and it is with a view of securing a supply for household use that a rush is made to the banks as soon as the flying jagged mist appears upon the horizon.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LIFE IN THE *KIBITKAS.*

Savage dogs—Vambéry's house—Turcoman want of ideas about time—Smoke—Sore eyes—Conversation—Patients—Visiting formalities—Turcoman hospitality—Karakchi thieves—Physical types of Yamuds—A Turcoman belle—Nursing children—Tekké bugbears—Plurality of wives—A domestic quarrel and its consequences.

LIFE in a Turcoman village is but a dreary affair when the first impressions of novelty have worn off. As a rule, one does not, after having taken his first dozen strolls, care to walk about to be stared at by the inhabitants and harassed by the ferocious dogs, which rush in scores at a stranger clad in European attire. I know of nothing more annoying than these dogs. They are exceedingly useful as guardians of the place, for no one can come within a mile of them without his presence being made known by their noisy barking, and they are most efficient in preventing thieves from carrying off the horses, which are never under cover, but stand tethered by the fetlock close by their owners' *kibitkas.*

I usually confined myself to my dwelling, making notes, or conversing with the too numerous visitors who invaded Dourdi's residence. This was the same in which Vambéry had lived, for, notwithstanding that he succeeded in passing through unrecognised as a European, the inhabitants afterwards learned his true character, doubtless from the Russians of the naval station at Ashuradé, close by. I

heard of the famous Hungarian from a person named Kan Jan Kelté, the son of Kotsak, his former host. He described the traveller as being like Timour Lenk, the great Central Asian conqueror, *i.e.*, somewhat lame. Of course this knowledge of Vambéry was not arrived at until some time after his departure from among the Yamuds, as otherwise it might have fared badly with him, and he certainly would not at that time have been allowed to pass on. The most singular fact in connexion with this matter was that when I asked for the date of Vambéry's arrival at Gumush Tepé my informant could give me only a very vague reply. This is characteristic of the Turcomans. They seem to have no idea of time beyond a period of twelve months, and cannot tell whether an occurrence took place eight, ten, or twenty years ago, generally referring the questioner to some striking event, and explaining that the matter to which the query relates happened before or after it.

One of the most disagreeable features of a Turcoman hut is the ever-present smoke, which is produced by the combined combustion of green wood, cuttings from fir planking, and camel's dung. The fire is scarcely ever allowed to go out, and the Turcomans will assure the guest, by way of reconciling him to the nuisance, that it is admirable as a means for keeping flies out of the *kibitka*. This is doubtless true, but it appears to me that a very nice judgment would be required to discriminate as to the lesser of the two evils. In winter, especially, one becomes as black with soot in twenty-four hours as if he had been living in a chimney, and his only chance of avoiding suffocation is to lie down with his face as near to the ground as possible. To stand up would be to risk asphyxiation in the creosote-fraught atmosphere. The smoke occupies the upper two-thirds of the apartment, and condenses about the top of the domed roof, converting the long, pendent cobwebs into so

many sooty stalactites, which, when they become too ponderous for their own suspending strength, descend silently into one's food, or settle in heavy black stripes across his face as he lies asleep. At the end of a few days one is as thoroughly smoke-dried as the most conscientious curer could desire his hams to be. The creosote resulting from the burning of the fresh pinewood produces inflammation of the eyes, and, after some months' residence in these maritime *kibitkas*, one is not surprised that *keratitis* and bleared eyes should be so universally met with among the Turcomans.

The utter absence of privacy was also a most aggravating element of my sojourn in Gumush Tepé. Ordinarily, I shared my dwelling with Dourdi, his wife, child, niece, and a calf; but in addition to these there was an intolerable continuation of *levées* to be held, at each of which at least fifteen or twenty visitors were present. It was impossible to do anything in the shape of taking notes, or, indeed, to write at all. It is the greatest mistake in the world to suppose that Orientals are taciturn—those, at least, who are to be met with in these regions. There was incessant babbling and chattering. The conversation was of a very limited kind, being mainly confined to geographical subjects, of which the talkers had but very crude notions. At first I used to try most conscientiously to explain the whereabouts of certain countries, but, finding my auditors altogether unable to comprehend the distances which I mentioned, I afterwards confined myself to indicating the points of the compass at which the various countries lay, dividing my measurements into 'very far,' and 'very far indeed,' with which explanations they were completely satisfied. I was constantly overwhelmed by the most ridiculous questions, such as, 'How much *moajib* (salary) did the Ingleez Padishah receive annually?' Being informed that

the English Padishah was a lady, they could with difficulty be persuaded that I was not playing upon their credulity; and the pointing out of England and Hindostan as lying at opposite points of the compass seemed to confirm them in this idea. As a rule, these people have not the slightest conception of the existence of Britain, Hindostan being supposed by them to be the real England. There was a general anxiety to know my age, whether I had a father or mother, how many brothers I had, and their respective ages. I was never asked if I had sisters, it being contrary to Eastern etiquette to speak of ladies, or even to ask if one is married. The information, after being given to those who sat nearest to me, was conveyed to the next tier of anxious listeners, who in turn communicated it to the outer circle. All this ground had to be gone over afresh for the benefit of each set of new comers, as if the subject had been of absorbing and general interest. The whole proceeding was not only exceedingly ludicrous, but worrying in the extreme. Some sat in solemn silence, their eyes fixed upon my face, but the majority were aggressively inquisitive, and I often found myself seriously calculating how long I was prepared to bear this sort of torture without becoming demented. After some weeks, however, I began to get case-hardened, and I resolved that I would go on with my writing, no matter what might be the nature of the surrounding circumstances. Accordingly, I used to sit down doggedly upon my carpet, paying no attention whatever to the batches of new comers, and as I sat, taciturnly writing by the smoky light of the *astatki* lamp, the onlookers were filled with amazement at my obduracy and unwillingness to speak to them. 'Why,' said one of my visitors, one evening, when after half an hour's questioning he had only succeeded in extracting surly monosyllables from me, 'I never saw such a silent person as you are. If I had only

travelled half the distance that you have I should never have done talking about my adventures.' This man's name was Agha Jik, a Goklan Turcoman, who had thought proper to change his tribe, owing to the want of security for life and property obtaining among his own clansmen. He was a very lively old fellow, and, considering the extreme pliability of his tongue, I have no doubt that he would have kept his word under the circumstances to which he alluded.

Another kind of suffering which I had to endure was entailed by the continual examining into and prescribing for the various maladies which seemed to have alighted upon my interviewers expressly for my persecution. Fever, hepatic disease, sore eyes, and a hundred other complaints passed in review before me, for everyone coming from Frangistan is here supposed to be a physician. There was a constant drawing upon my small stock of medicines, and, when I declared that I had not a certain remedy, my patient would exclaim, in amazement, 'What! you have been in Stamboul and Frangistan, and you have not any medicine!'

According to ordinary Turcoman ceremonial, a visitor draws aside the carpet which hangs curtain-wise before the door, and utters the sacramental *Selam aleik*. He always knows by the tone of the reply whether it is convenient that he should enter or not, and if his salutation be not returned at all, he takes it for granted that there is a grievance against him. An instance of this occurred at the very *kibitka* in which I was staying. A Turcoman of very bad character and dissolute habits had been going round the village spreading rumours that my host was swindling and plundering me in the most reprehensible manner, and, this coming to old Dourdi's ears, the latter at once asked me whether I believed that such had been

his treatment of me. I of course replied in the negative. Shortly afterwards, the propagator of the defamatory report, not dreaming that his lying statements had reached my host's ears, presented himself at the open door, and uttered the customary *Selam aleik*. Old Dourdi, who was looking with half-closed eyes in the direction of the entrance, steadily ignored the presence of the intruder, I myself following his example. As a consequence, after a few minutes' pause, the would-be visitor, probably guessing that his calumnies had been duly reported to the subject of them, walked sheepishly away, and never again troubled us by his presence. It is, above all, imperative upon the caller never to enter if he sees that the inmates are at meals; for this would entail upon the people of the house the necessity of asking him to partake of their food, and every Turcoman knows that his countrymen are not always in a position to extend such hospitality. When the *entrée* of the house is permitted, the visitor approaches with the utmost ceremony, and for fully three or four minutes there is a muttered exchange of formalities. '*Amanme?*' says the superior, as the senior is always considered, except in the case of a chief. '*Amanlugme,*' replies the other. '*Amansalugme, Kiffenkokme,*' '*Sorache,*' '*Elhamd-Ellilah,*' and many another ceremonious phrase, follow upon each other. Should as many as twenty persons be present when a visitor comes in, the ceremonial must be gone through separately with each, in the order of his rank or seniority. In this respect the Yamuds are precisely like the Osmanli Turks, the salaaming movement of the hand and valedictory phrases of the latter only being omitted. Among the Turcomans the matter winds up with the '*Khosh Geldi*' (You are welcome). Notwithstanding all this formality upon entering, there is none whatever when one of the company departs. He rises abruptly, and leaves

the room as though something had been said which had direly offended him. No one else takes the slightest notice of his withdrawal, nor does he himself, even by a nod, salute the company. As in all Eastern society, it is of course necessary to remove one's slippers on entering, or at least when stepping upon the carpeted portion of the *kibitka*, and you must also remain covered, as a mark of respect. To uncover the head before a respectable Oriental gathering would be almost as inexcusable as to remove one's nether garments in a fashionable London saloon. I have often perspired under the heat of my sheepskin hat, and would have given half my worldly goods to be able to doff that article of clothing, but was compelled to bear with the inconvenience for fear of being regarded as a grossly discourteous person. Sometimes, if only yourself and your host be present, and he should feel very hot himself, he may possibly extend his politeness so far as to say 'You may take off your hat if you like;' but then it is always understood that you keep on the small skull-cap, which no true Oriental ever removes, whether by day or by night. Should a stranger arrive, there is a sudden donning of head-dresses, as if the new-comer were about to make some murderous attack upon the crania of the inmates, and they needed protection against his violence.

The hospitality of the desert has been a good deal impaired, in the case of the Yamuds along the Persian border, owing to their contact with their more than usually mercenary Persian neighbours, and with the ready-monied, well-paying Russian authorities. Still, the semblance of it exists. A Turcoman in whose house you have been staying for a few days will accept nothing for the board and lodging which he has supplied to you, though he will unhesitatingly take payment for the oats and fodder consumed by your horse. You may ask him, in the most explicit terms, how

many *chanaks* of oats or barley have been supplied, and how many bundles of hay, and he will at once inform you. To inquire how much you owe him for the boiled fowls and *pilaff* which you have eaten, however, would be to seriously offend him. But when you are going away he expects a handsome *peshkesh*, and will think you a shabby individual indeed, if you have an air of being at all above the ordinary, if he does not in this guise receive from you two or three times the value of what you have been provided with. I must say, however, that in the case of their own countrymen who are known not to be too well off, and especially in the case of wandering dervishes, their liberality is unbounded, and they do not entertain the slightest expectation of remuneration, nor would they accept any. The dervish is supposed to be a man of God, though as a rule he is the reverse—at least the Persian one is; and as regards the Turcoman who is on his travels, the host expects that, should it come to his turn to pay a visit to the guest who is at his house, he will meet with a like return of hospitality. I was very much struck by the resemblance between the manners and phrases of these people and those of the Spaniards. They will tell you that the house and all that it contains are yours; and if you speak in terms of praise of any article belonging to your host, he feels bound to tell you that it is altogether at your disposal, and in several cases I have been forced to accept at the hands of chiefs that which I happened to commend. But, while treating you in this princely fashion—for a Turcoman considers that a man of rank must never withhold what his guest fancies—the donor will compensate himself for his own generosity by praising in return something which is in your own possession, and of course there is nothing for it but to present the gift with a good grace, no matter how much you may stand in need of the particular article.

This rule does not apply to arms and horses, for a stranger on the plains cannot part with what are to him absolute necessities.

The Yamuds, that is, those of any social standing, are very particular in guarding against the theft of anything belonging to a recipient of their hospitality, and are ready to resent any such outrage in the swiftest and severest manner. The following is an instance of this. The horses, as I have said, are tethered in the open air, close to the *kibitkas* of their owners. They are protected against the heat of the sun by day, and the severity of the cold at night, by being swathed in an enormous sheet of felt, nearly an inch thick, which covers them from ears to tail, and meets underneath the belly. This is tied round two or three times with a broad girth, and will enable the animal to withstand any kind of weather. The horses themselves prefer this mode of being kept warm, and I found it impossible to induce my Turcoman steeds to enter a stable. They thus stood close to my residence, and my own personal charger was covered with a very expensive felt rug. Close to the Atterek Delta is a village inhabited by what are known to their more respectable brethren as a tribe of Karakchi. These are robbers *par excellence*. They are always mistrusted by the other Turcomans, whose own morality is not of too strict an order. One day a pair of these gentlemen honoured Gumush Tepé with a visit. They did not leave until rather late in the evening, and on the following morning my horse-rug had disappeared. I complained to old Dourdi, who almost wept with indignation on hearing that his guest had thus been despoiled of his property, and immediately rushed to the house of the chief to inform him of this breach of decorum. Scarce five minutes had elapsed when the avengers were on foot; at their head was Agha Jik, the sprightly old Goklan. No

time was lost in any preliminary inquiry, for no such inquiry was necessary. Two Karakchi Turcomans had been in our camp on the previous evening; no one else could be guilty of such a violation of the laws of hospitality, and the conclusion was at once drawn that they must be the delinquents; and as one of them happened to bear a worse character than the other, he was the individual selected as the actual offender. The body of horsemen proceeded swiftly to the Karakchi village, and entered the house of the supposed thief. Placing their knives at his breast, they summarily demanded the restoration of the stolen property. When a Turcoman commits a theft, he feels bound, for some reason which it is difficult to understand, to die rather than give back what he has purloined, just as he will cut the throat of a captive rather than part with him without a ransom. The Karakchi protested, but the more he did so the fiercer and more imperative became the demand, and he at length replied that although he could not restore what he had not taken, he could supply a cloth of equal value. This logic seemed perfectly satisfactory to the others. A rug very nearly as good as that which had been abstracted was produced, and brought away in triumph. It was not quite so valuable as the one I had lost, but when asked by my redressors whether I felt satisfied with it, I of course answered that I was, for I did not wish to give them unnecessary trouble, fearing that further prosecution of my claim might entail bloodshed. I knew that if I persisted, the least they would have felt bound to do would have been to collect the amount of the difference in value from among the villagers. I have had similar experiences with almost all the Turcomans with whom I have come in contact, however wild they were, and it is only of the children and lads that I have to complain, for these latter are frightful thieves and liars. These Karakchi

Turcomans are held in universal detestation by the other tribes around them, and the wonder is that they have not been exterminated. My host told me that they creep into the villages at night, and, cutting through the exterior matting and felt of the *kibitka* walls with their long keen knives, introduce their arms and steal whatever they have previously noted while entering during the day. Hence he warned me not to hang my sword, revolver, or any other article of value, against the wall, but to place them beside me as I slept. The village dogs, great nuisances as they are, are well worth keeping, for the sake of protection against these audacious thieves.

The usual Turcoman physical type, both male and female, is rough, rude, and vigorous, and quite in contrast with that of the frontier Persian, which is sleek, cat-like, feeble, and mean. The worst part of the Turcoman is his head, which is decidedly conical, the point being thrown somewhat to the rear. A phrenologist would say that firmness was very pronounced, conscientiousness wanting, and benevolence small. The features are not of that Tartar cast that one would be apt to suppose in denizens of East Caspian districts, and though here and there may be seen a suspicion of peeping eye, a tendency towards flattening of the point of the nose, and occasionally high cheek bones, on the whole the faces are more European than otherwise. In fact, I have seen some physiognomies at Gumush Tepé which, if accompanied by an orthodox European dress, would pass muster anywhere as belonging to natives of the West. It is among the women that the absence of European features is most conspicuous. There are many of them who could fairly be reckoned pretty, though it is quite a different order of beauty from that to which we are accustomed. I recollect, during a solitary ride along the banks of the Giurgen river, coming upon a small *ova*, or collection

of Turcoman huts. Being very tired, I dismounted at the door of one of them, and attaching my horse's bridle to the door-post, entered. The hut had but two occupants, one an elderly woman, the other a girl of apparently about eighteen years. The latter, as I afterwards learned, was the daughter of the local chief, and was on a visit. She was in full gala costume, and wore over her crimson silk shirt a coat of green cloth, fitting very closely at the waist, and falling half-way to the ankle, the skirt being cut into a series of plaitings like those of a Highland soldier's tunic. The sleeves fitted closely as far as the elbows, but below that point they were exceedingly large, and open behind. The edges of the opening, as well as the cuff, were ornamented by a double line of small spherical silver buttons, while the front of the coat, and also the breast of the shirt, were decorated with the usual rows of hanging silver coins. Around her neck was a large silver collar, set with cornelians and small gold panels, and supporting by a series of chains a long cylindrical case containing talismanic writings. The huge band-box head-dress, which she had laid aside, was of even more than the ordinary preposterous dimensions. Its front was hung over with festoons of small gold coins, interspersed with star-like silver ornaments, and, springing from the centre of the top, and falling backwards, was a green silk coat with sleeves, the seams doubled with crimson, and the entire back covered with stamped silver ornaments. This young lady, who, if she did not wear 'her heart upon her sleeve,' apparently bore her purse upon her head, was one of the prettiest of her race that I had yet seen. Her complexion was remarkably clear, and had in it more of colour than is generally to be met with in the sun-tanned physiognomies of her companions. Her dark eyebrows were arched; her delicately formed nose was of slightly aquiline contour; her

eyes were large, dark, and intelligent; her mouth as near perfection as possible; her chin small, and remarkably prominent. Long brown hair, in colour approaching to blackness, fell in two large plaited tresses between her shoulders, each tress bearing silver pieces extending over a space of at least two feet, the coins growing larger towards the bottom, where figured either Russian rouble pieces or Persian five-kran ones. Neither of the ladies was in the least abashed by my entry. The elder motioned me to a seat, and after the usual salutations we entered into conversation. The younger one showed especial curiosity as to who I was, and why I was roving about alone upon the plains. She asked me about the dress of ladies in my country; then how I liked her costume, and next how I liked herself. It is not usual to meet with such an utter absence of embarrassment or attempt at veiling, even among Turcoman women, so that when she conducted herself in this unrestrained manner before me, a stranger, I could only suppose that her demeanour in regard to those with whom she was better acquainted must have been exceedingly confiding and *sans gêne*. I am sorry to say that this young lady is a very uncommon example of the sex of her race. It is among the men that the handsome individuals must be sought for, especially when there has been an admixture of Persian blood. The scanty beard of the pure Turcoman is then replaced by one of much more luxurious proportions, and of a darker tint; the nose assumes a more or less aquiline form, and the eye loses the cold grey expression so characteristic of the pure-blooded dweller on the Steppes. Whether or not it be owing to the peculiarity of the race, or to the laborious occupations to which they are subjected almost from infancy—grinding corn, carrying water, cooking, and in their leisure hours carpet making and spinning—at a comparatively early age they lose whatever comeliness they

may have possessed, and on approaching anything like an advanced age degenerate into withered and witch-like beldames. The contrary is the case with the male sex, probably for contrary reasons, for a Turcoman of any pretensions whatever never occupies himself with menial labour, and, indeed, seldom exerts himself in any way, except in a foray against his neighbours' cattle, or in a hostile expedition into Persia. The woman, in the midst of her family circle, retains her place beside the fire, even though a number of strange men should enter; but she is not supposed to go to another house where there is such an assembly of male persons, unless it be for the express purpose of talking to the mistress of that house, in which case she enters and retires entirely unnoticed by the people present, save by the person to whom she came to speak. Beside her own hearth, on the contrary, she is saluted, and returns the salute. When a Turcoman happens to possess more than one wife, the latest and favourite one is always the best dressed, and is exempted as much as possible from domestic labour, her predecessor or predecessors performing the necessary household duties. These latter, however, retain a certain seniority, and are treated with more respect by strangers. In fact, if a wife be very recently married, she is understood not to make herself too prominent in the *kibitka* in which she lives.

Turcoman women are usually very industrious, never seeming tired of work. This is probably because labour is the only means at their disposal for breaking the monotony of their otherwise dull lives. I have seen a woman, when unable to sleep, rise at two o'clock in the morning, light the smoky *astatki* lamp, and proceed to beguile the weary hours by grinding corn in a heavy horizontal stone hand-mill, for the morning meal. It is quite the exception for a man to fetch water from the river. This is generally done

by the younger female members of the family, the daughters, if there be any, and if not, by the younger wife or wives, who on such occasions generally carry with them the suckling children or those who cannot safely be left by themselves. These are borne astride upon one hip, the body of the mother being thrown over to the opposite side, one arm passing round the child's waist, while the other supports the heavy water pitcher, both sides being thus mutually balanced.

As on board ship when space is scarce, the oblong cane basket which serves as a cradle for young children is supported at one end by the double camel-hair rope which descends from the centre of the dome, the other being attached to the top of the lattice work forming the inside of the wall. A sufficiently erudite collector of nursery rhymes would no doubt be highly delighted with some of the ditties crooned by Turcoman women as they swing their babies to and fro in this hammock-like machine. The utterances to which they give vent when persuading their young offspring to take food are very strange, and often, when lying flat upon my carpet, busily engaged in writing, I have lifted up my head in amazement in order to discover the object of the strange intonations which reached my ear. Once the mother was uttering hoarse, gurgling sounds, like those of an uneasy wild animal, all the while contorting her features into a variety of simian grimaces not unworthy of an hilarious baboon, and all simply with a view of inducing the child upon her lap to partake of some fried fish. It is no bad exemplification of the estimation in which the Tekké Turcomans of the interior were held by these Yamuds, that mothers menaced unruly children with the threat that if they did not behave themselves the Tekkés would be sent for directly.

As a rule, plurality of wives, when it occurs, does not

seem to disturb the peace of a Turcoman home, even though the master of the *aladjak* does not often follow out the prescription of the Koran by providing a separate habitation for each of his spouses. Still, 'breezes will ruffle the flowers sometimes,' and I once had a notable proof of this. A little after sunset one evening, as I was sitting at the door of my *kibitka*, looking out across the waters of the Giurgen, I perceived a lurid blaze, which soon spread into a sheet of rolling fire reaching far away to the south and west. The suddenness of the conflagration startled me, and I thought it might be the result of one of those sudden incursions which might be expected at any moment in these regions. Soon, however, my old host made his appearance, stifling his laughter at something which he evidently considered a very good joke. On asking him what all the fire was about, and at what he was so amused, he informed me that in the house of a friend of his, who had lately married his second wife, disputes had arisen between the partakers of his affections. From words they had come to blows, and at length the combatants, finding no better weapons near, seized lighted brands from the hearth, and pelted them recklessly at each other. The house contained a quantity of hemp and other inflammable material, and was quickly in a blaze. It stood close to the margin of a meadow, in which, owing to the abundance of water, the grass had grown to a great height. Having been allowed to stand uncut, it had been dried by the sun of the preceding autumn, and, the flames spreading to it, the conflagration ensued.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SKETCHES OF GUMUSH TEPÉ.

College at Gumush Tepé—Professor of theology—Late school hours—Sunni and Shiia—Specimen of sectarian hatred—The white fowl mystery—Fever—Hurried burials—Mourning rites—Returning hadjis—Distinctive marks—Trade and commerce—Tanning sheepskins—Pomegranate bark—*Kusgun* and *yapundja*—Krans and tomans—Disputes about money—Turcoman measures—Recreations—The Turcomans and 'Punch'—Agha Jik's ideas—After nightfall.

My *kibitka* was within thirty feet of the river's edge. In the intervening space, standing on a kind of earthern pier, and protected by boards against the action of the current, stood another *kibitka*, of unusually large dimensions. This was the mosque attended by the more select portion of the community, and it was the only instance I had seen of a covered building used for religious purposes by the Turcomans. In the intervals between the hours of prayer this edifice was utilised as a *medressé*, or college, in which candidates for the priesthood were instructed in reading, writing, and the precepts of the Koran, by an *ahound*, or professor, who passed as the possessor of great erudition. He was a square, solidly built man of about fifty years of age, with a suspiciously Tartar-looking nose, a slight chin tuft, and still slighter moustache. He habitually wore spectacles, which imparted to his countenance, for a resident of Gumush Tepé, a wonderfully sagacious and learned look. He was an Oozbeg, from Bokhara, and had studied theology at the college of Samarcand. Besides his profes-

sorial functions, he also exercised those of timber and general merchant to the community, for though he was a moullah, or priest, the injunctions of the Koran did not forbid his engaging in lay occupations. He was very active, and seemed to sleep but little. His class of some fifteen students, all young men of about seventeen or eighteen years of age, generally assembled about midnight, and from that time until three in the morning there was an incessant babble of tongues within this Central Asian seminary. All the pupils were engaged simultaneously in reading from the Koran at the highest pitch of their voices, which were not very feeble ones. Turcomans, from living constantly in the open air, and conversing on horseback, have naturally vigorous voices, and habitually speak in very loud tones. Indeed, I have often seen two of them, seated at the same fire, within a house, adopt the same stentorian tone in conversation as if they were addressing each other from opposite sides of the river Giurgen. By this it may be imagined that the uproar within the *medressé* was no ordinary one, and that, being only a few feet removed from my dwelling-place, it was not easy to go to sleep under such circumstances. Towards three o'clock, by which time they seemed to become rather fatigued, the Professor took up the chorus, and commenced to expound the Koran in a pompous and pretentious tone, and daylight would be well advanced before he thought fit to desist. During the remainder of the day he attended to his secular affairs, or kept an eye upon his college, to see that no unauthorised intrusions took place within its holy precincts; and I have more than once seen him, spectacles on nose and stick in hand, furiously chasing a multitude of hens and geese out of this Trans-Caspian temple of theology. Morning and evening the old gentleman who acted as *muezzim* took his stand before the door, and his melancholy,

musical, long-drawn cry might be heard floating across the silent plain, calling the faithful to their devotions, a summons which, I regret to say, was seldom answered save by a dozen or fifteen of the older and more respectable inhabitants.

These Turcomans are all rigid Sunnites, and cherish the due orthodox detestation of the cursed Shiia sect, of which their neighbours the Persians are members. They do not, in fact, regard the latter as Mussulmans at all, and have a much greater regard for the Jews and Christians. My old host Dourdi was a genuine specimen of the Sunnite. He said his prayers with the greatest regularity, always previously washing his face, hands, and feet, with rigid attention to the rites of his sect—if, indeed, he would not have considered it blasphemy to describe Sunnism as a sect —taking care that the water ran in a proper manner over the points of his elbows, and not after the damnable fashion of the Shiites. He once accompanied me on a shooting expedition along the coast, as far as the old Gumush Tepé mound. After a while we seated ourselves upon its summit, and I produced a cold fowl, some bread, and a bottle of arrack, whereon to breakfast. The old man was nothing loth, and joined heartily in my repast, taking frequent pulls at the arrack bottle, notwithstanding the fact that this indulgence was in direct opposition to the tenets in regard to which he was in other respects so conscientious. All at once he ceased masticating—his mouth cram-full of fowl—as if some dire thought had struck him. 'Where,' said he, 'did you procure this?' I guessed at his meaning, and replied that he need have no fear on the score of the fowl, that it had been duly prepared by a Mussulman, and that I had bought them in the bazaar at Asterabad the day before. At this he began with fury to spit out every morsel that his mouth contained, uttering ejaculations of pious horror,

and now and again applying his lips to the arrack bottle with a view of still further purifying himself. I demanded what he meant by treating food, prepared by a brother Mussulman, in that manner, and assured him that I had no hand in the preparation. 'Mussulman!' he exclaimed. 'Do you call those cursed dogs of Asterabad, Mussulmans? 'They are *Kaffirs* (unbelievers). May their fathers' graves 'be eternally defiled! Had it been yourself who had killed 'and prepared this fowl, I would have no objection to it; but 'unbelieving infidels of Shiites! I would rather perish with 'hunger than taste a morsel which one of them had 'touched!' It seemed odd enough to hear this old fellow talking thus savagely about his fellow Mussulmans, who differed from him very little but in name; and all the while grasping by the neck the uncorked bottle of spirits, which his profound appreciation of the precepts of the Koran ought to have taught him to eschew. *A propos* of fowls, a strange idea had got abroad about this time, the origin of which I found it very difficult to trace. Its substance was that any one having live white-feathered fowls of any description in his possession after the first of the coming Bairam would infallibly lose his life—that a snake would issue from the throat of each, and inflict a fatal bite upon its owner. When or how this idea originated I have over and over again tried to discover, but in vain; so great, however, was the hold which it took upon the popular imagination, both in Asterabad and on the outlying plains, that long before the day named, white-feathered birds of every description had disappeared, and ducks, geese, and other poultry of the fatal plumage could at the time be purchased for the most trifling sums. I afterwards heard it uncharitably whispered at Teheran that the notion was set on foot by Armenian contractors, who were charged with the furnishing of a new regulation plume for

certain troops in the Shah's service, and which it was necessary should be composed of white feathers, and that these gentlemen adopted this method of securing a plentiful and cheap supply. I will not, however, vouch for the truth of this explanation.

Though my residence at Gumush Tepé was principally during the commencement of the year, deaths by fever were painfully frequent, the low, swampy country being pregnant with ague. The unfortunate Turcomans took no remedial measures, quinine being unknown to them save by repute. They had heard of a wonderful medicine which could cure them, *gina-gina*, as they called it, and when it became known that I had this much-prized remedy in my possession my *kibitka* was besieged night and day with applicants. This intermittent fever and ague, when neglected, reduces the sufferer to a miserable condition; he becomes the colour of a corpse, incessant vomitings set in, and in two or three years he dies, a mere skeleton. Among Mahometans the breath has scarcely left the body before the remains are hurried to the grave. It was not unusual, in crossing the wide waste spaces around the *aoull*, to meet a party of ten or twelve persons going at a run towards the old mound beside the sea-shore—the ordinary burying-place, six bearing upon their shoulders a corpse, wrapped in a sheet, the others relieving them in turn. According to their ideas, the soul is in suffering so long as the body remains over ground after death. No doubt this precept is inculcated by way of enforcing, in hot countries, the speedy burial of the deceased; and each person who assists in thus carrying the dead body to its last resting-place is supposed to receive some special blessing or indulgence. One is frequently awakened in the night by a shrill burst of wailing from a neighbouring *kibitka*, the cries of the women intimating that a member of the family has died. This lasts for a few

minutes, and then the tramp of the bearers is heard. The real funeral ceremonies commence subsequently, and are carried to an unreasonable length. The male relatives gather from far and near, and a large carpet is spread before the door for their accommodation, the women of the family remaining within the hut. As each party of new-comers arrives within fifty yards of the place, each places the wrist of his right arm across his eyes, and bursts into a series of the most hideous howls, supposed to be expressive of deep grief, though to me they would convey the impression of being produced by violent rage on the part of the utterer. Step by step the relatives draw near, howling all the time, and pausing at every three or four steps. Then they circle slowly round the dwelling, uttering more terrible cries than before. Having made the circuit of the house three times, they kneel upon the carpet, where the others are already seated, and, bowing their faces to the ground, and resting upon their arms, continue their demonstrations of sorrow, which gradually become less and less vehement until they cease entirely. Then comes a pause, after which each one sits up and enters into conversation with the company; water-pipes are brought, and general topics are discussed. At the moment when the last party of men cease their uproar, the women inside the hut commence replying, giving vent to a kind of mournful jabbering accompanied by rhythmical clapping of the hands, and now and again breaking into a kind of recitative chant, probably laudatory of the merits of the deceased, though I was never able to understand the burden of the muffled notes which issued from behind the felt walls. This uncouth mourning continues during the first three or four days, and the family of the deceased, if rich enough, order a sheep to be killed for consumption by those who attend the obsequies, some of the richer relatives performing a like act of hospitality.

Though the more immediate and formal rites terminate in a few days, three or four months elapse before the ceremonies are altogether concluded, for during this period all those friends from a distance who are unable to attend during the first days make their appearance from time to time, and the whole thing is repeated. Some months previously to my arrival, a death had occurred in Dourdi's *kibitka*, and once, about midnight, when busily engaged in writing out my notes, I was terribly startled by a diabolical yelling within two feet of me, just outside the felt wall. I hastily awakened my host, and inquired the reason of the disturbance, when he informed me of the demise which had taken place. Though when the slightest strange noise occurs within the village during the night the dogs at once burst out into furious barking, so well is this death chant known to them, that they do not, on hearing it, make the usual demonstrations. On the contrary, I have known them join in the wail, in plaintive unison. When the chief of the household dies, a small mound of earth about two feet in height is erected close to the dwelling as a memorial of him, and the sites of former villages or encampments are often to be recognised by the ground being dotted with these mementoes. Of course, in the event of the demise of a chief the obsequies are on a larger scale, and proportionately lengthened, and the 'funeral baked meats' are served out liberally to all comers—who, when viands are about, are, I need not say, pretty numerous. Over the grave itself is raised a mound of four or five feet in height. The greater the rank of the deceased, the larger is the mound.

Every Turcoman who can possibly afford the expense of the journey makes a pilgrimage to Mecca. To avoid passing through the country of the hated Shiites, pilgrims prefer the route through Russian territory, and up to a short time

ago went by way of Gumush Tepé, Baku, Poti, and Constantinople. Now, since the opening of the railroad between Krasnavodsk and the Akhal Tekké, this route is preferred. I have been informed that during the next two years it will be open free of charge to these or any other Turcoman travellers. At least, so I was told at Baku. I saw some *hadjis* returning to Gumush Tepé. They were three in number, and had been announced some hours beforehand. Many persons went out on horseback to meet them, to be the first to receive their blessing in all its newness and freshness, and by contact with them to absorb a portion of the recently acquired holiness into their own persons. As they drew near the village, crowds of old and young flocked out to meet them, saluting them cordially in the Turcoman fashion. The newly-arrived pilgrims had large white turban cloths rolled round their black sheepskin tiaras. Anyone who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca is entitled ever afterwards to wear a white turban, and enjoys considerable reputation for sanctity. As far as I could see, to a large extent he makes this latter redound not a little to his own personal and material comfort. Everyone is anxious to hear the story of the traveller's experiences in the foreign countries through which he has passed; and the traveller in nowise loth to detail them again and again, to the accompaniment of unlimited *pilaff*, tea, and water-pipes.

The commerce and manufactures of Gumush Tepé, as may readily be imagined, are neither extensive nor varied. In fact, up to the time of the arrival of the expeditionary troops at Tchikislar, the Turcomans had little notion of anything of the kind. After that event they were actively occupied in supplying the camp with firewood from the coast near Gez, with hay from their own plains and river banks, and with all the corn and rice which they could

manage to extract from the Persians. Apart from this I do not know of any exports. The carpets which they make are retained for their own use; the slow rate at which they are produced, and the high price which would necessarily be asked for them, would effectually extinguish any attempt at commerce in such articles. The greater portion of their commerce is therefore in the shape of imports, for they consume large quantities of tea and sugar. These commodities do not come from Tckikislar and Baku, but direct from Asterabad. Even with the people of the latter city the transactions are on a limited scale, no confidence whatever existing between buyer and seller. All bargains are of a ready-money character, and ready money is very scarce among the Turcomans. Calicoes, both plain and printed, are also largely imported; these are chiefly of Russian manufacture, as would naturally be supposed, though French prints are occasionally to be seen upon the piles of merchandise within the *kibitkas* of the more extensively dealing merchants. These imported articles are sold in retail by those Turcomans who play the *rôle* of shopkeepers, at an enormous profit, fifty per cent. at least upon the retail price at Asterabad. It is highly amusing to watch the local merchant as he serves his customers with tea and sugar. The *terazi*, or scales, are of the rudest description, and consist of a bar of turned wood pierced in the middle by a hole, through which passes a thong, knotted at one end. The pans are composed of half-gourds, rudely supported by leather thongs. My host, who was himself a merchant in a small way, when selling two *krans'* worth (two francs) of sugar, was accustomed to place an iron boat-bolt, his dagger, and a small adze in one scale as the exact balance of the quantum which he proposed to give in exchange for that sum of money. I have often managed to penetrate into a Türcoman house through having to make

purchases of groceries and other commodities, and have remarked that whatever slight remnant of Eastern jealousy with regard to women might exist among the other Turcomans, these shopkeepers, owing to their continued and necessary contact with both sexes, have no trace of such feeling remaining. One day I went to a *kibitka* shop to buy some tea. Instead of a counter there was a long, broad board, slightly raised from the mat on which it was supported, and covered with bowls and packages of tea, loaves of sugar, and rolls of *tumbaki*. Behind this board, extended at full length, her shoulders reclining upon a large crimson silk pillow, was the wife of the proprietor, who in his absence conducted the concern. She was dressed in the extreme of the Turcoman fashion. Her ornaments were more copious than usual, and she was, next to the young lady whom I have described as having met in the *kibitka* along the Giurgen, the finest Turcoman woman I have seen. She seemed rather relieved by the advent of some one to admire her costume, and herself too, I suppose, for she had apparently been wasting 'her sweetness on the desert air' for a length of time.

The supply of fish in the Caspian, and especially in the neighbourhoods of the estuaries of rivers, is enormous, and if the Turcomans had any sort of commercial spirit they might find ample occupation in catching and drying it, were it only for the supply of their brother Turcomans inhabiting the plain to the eastward. This Caspian fish, now that a railroad has penetrated to the interior of Central Asia, will probably be a notable article of commerce in the future.

The manufactures of Gumush Tepé, after those of the wooden framework for *kibitkas*, and the building of fishing luggers and other craft, of which one is constructed now and then, include that of sheepskin overcoats (*yapundjas*

or *kusguns*). The fresh skins are salted on the side opposite to the wool, and then packed together in bundles. When thoroughly dry they are scraped with a sharp morsel of wood, and afterwards with pumice-stone, until their inner surfaces are tolerably smooth. They are then thickly sprinkled with powdered alum, and a boiling decoction of pomegranate rind is poured over them. They are allowed to dry, and the operation is then repeated. The skin thus undergoes a kind of tanning, which gives it a bright amber tint, deepening in proportion to the number of operations to which it is subjected. It is, however, very rigid and hard, and requires to undergo a softening process before it can be sewn into garments. One extremity of the skin is attached to an iron loop situated at the top of the doorway. A small forked tree-branch, each limb of the fork a foot long, and having the inside of the angle carefully peeled and polished, is attached by one of its limbs to a stout cord, which in turn supports a kind of stirrup in which the foot is placed. The operator seizes the lower end of the suspended skin in his left hand, and, holding the whole of the skin in a more or less horizontal position, places the inside of the fork near its upper extremity. Then, leaning with his entire weight upon the stirrup, he drags the fork along the whole length of the interior of the skin. This is repeated again and again, until the tanned hide loses its stiffness, and becomes as pliant as a piece of chamois leather. As many as four sheepskins will go to make up one of these *kusguns*, or overcoats, for they are of very large dimensions, and the sleeves project for a foot beyond the extremity of the hand, the extra length of sleeve being used as a glove in cold weather. A good coat of this description costs from fifteen to twenty shillings. When the hide is that of lambs, or the wool is of a finer quality, the price rises in proportion, especially

when the front is stamped and embroidered, in which cases I have known five or eight pounds to be paid for a *kusgun*. The embossed and ornamented sheepskin coats are but little known among the Turcomans, being principally worn by the people of Derguez and by the Afghans. In dry weather these garments are worn with the tanned side turned outwards, the wool being next the body, but during rain or snow storms the wool is turned outwards for the purpose of shedding the water. The tanned side, if exposed to continued wet, will, by reason of its imperfect preparation, become indurated, and be liable to get torn. Owing to the proximity of the pomegranate jungles of Asterabad, which supply the tanning materials in the shape of the rind of the fruit, and the nearness of Asterabad and Baku, from which alum can be obtained, Gumush Tepé enjoys a tolerably good trade in these tanned hides, many of which are disposed of to the Turcomans who live farther inland.

Up to the arrival of the Russians at Tchikislar, the only coins known at Gumush Tepé were the *kran*, equal in value to a franc, and the *toman*, or gold ten-franc piece. These comprised the whole of the money recognised by the Turcomans, and, in fact, do so to the present day, except on the Caspian littoral. In the vicinity of the latter, however, not only silver roubles, but paper ones, are readily, and indeed eagerly received. It was a long time before the Turcomans could be got to understand the nature of paper money, but as they now see that in the Armenian warehouses and shops at Tchikislar it will stand them in better stead than their own dumpy silver coins, they have fallen readily into its use. Within the last three or four years the coinage of the Persian mint has been remodelled, and *krans* stamped in a European style, flattened out to the size of a franc, are now issued, instead of the little, irregularly shaped, thick morsels of silver, broken at the edges. There

are also two-*kran* and five-*kran* pieces. These also are received by the Gumush Tepé folk; but there are places further up the country where the Turcomans will have nothing to do with them, and will accept only the old-fashioned *kran* and *toman*. Even the *toman* is not always willingly received, for as a rule the Turcomans have little or no gold, and do not understand it. Owing to their variety, and to the different dates at which they have been coined, these *krans* are a constant source of dispute between buyer and seller, as any traveller in this part of the world will have had emphatically brought under his notice. There is one species of *kran* which to the ordinary observer is entirely indistinguishable from the others. This *kran* was struck at the town of Hamadan, in Persia, and no Persian or Turcoman will accept it unless a percentage be deducted. I could never definitely understand the reason of this. Some said that the silver was impure; others that the silver was pure, but that the coins were under the proper weight; others, again, that it did not bear the proper stamp, and so on. Each person had his own particular objection, and the end of it all was that this *kran* was usually only received after an abatement of one-tenth of its nominal value. There is another kind of *kran* known as the Queen Mother, which, like the new one, bears the impress of a lion and sun, a crown, and a wreath of laurel leaves. This was the result of the first attempt to imitate European coinage. It is held in still lower estimation than the last-mentioned one, and there are sundry others which come into the same category. Then there are the false ones, and those of mixed metal; also those manufactured by the Turcomans themselves, out of sufficiently pure silver, but with the inscription in intaglio instead of relievo. The consequence of these differences, and of the nice distinctions made between them, is that

if you have to pay away in *krans* a sum equal to five pounds sterling, the best part of a day is wasted in examining the coins one by one, and in hearing the arguments *pro* and *con* as to the relative merits of each.

Another endless source of dispute among the Turcomans is in regard to measure. When any material is sold by measure, calico for instance, the *arshun*, or *gez*, is employed. This measure is the distance between the tip of the nose and that of the fingers, the arm being outstretched. Of course its length is entirely dependent upon the dimensions of the arm of the measurer, and interminable are the controversies as to whether the calico shall be measured by the vendor or by the purchaser. Another kind of measuring is employed in the vending of corn—the *chanak*. This literally means 'bowl,' but it has also come to signify the quantity of corn which, piled to the utmost, can be held in the two palms, when joined after the manner of a basin. The sizes of the hands of these Turcomans vary very much, and a great variety of disputes is the consequence. There is another peculiarity in connexion with selling by measure. When the orthodox *chanak* bowl, one of certain recognised dimensions, is used, the buyer is generally allowed to measure for himself. He takes his place by the heap of corn, and his open sack stands ready at his side. He fills the *chanak* with his hands, heaping the corn carefully on so that it may rise as high as possible in a conical shape, and while a single grain more can be got to remain on the pile, he will not relinquish his attempts to be the gainer, be it by never so little. All this time he keeps repeating 'one, one, one,' 'two, two, two,' alluding to the first or second *chanak*, as the case may be, which he is engaged in filling up. Immediately upon pouring the contents of the bowl into his sack, he begins to fill afresh, again incessantly repeating the number of the *chanak*. It is curious to mark

the expressions upon the faces of merchant and buyer—the avarice upon the countenance of the one, and the anxiety on that of the other. From such exhibitions as these I have often turned away with disgust.

It is not often that the Turcomans indulge in amusements. Their indoor recreations appear to be confined to chess, and a game of odd and even, played with the red and white knuckle-bones of sheep, the red ones being tinted with cochineal. In the open air, on certain occasions, such as weddings, and during *Bairam*, they have races, and what the Arabs would call *fantasia*. This latter consists of a number of young men, mounted on swift horses, with drawn swords and loaded muskets, who ride wildly about, going through a mimic combat, and discharging their pieces right and left. Among the children I noticed the game of 'tip-cat,' and I have also seen genuine kite-flying. The paper kite is here termed *thomasé*. Whether its use be indigenous to the country, or whether it has been imported, I cannot say, but the Turcomans told me that it was of great antiquity. I have seen the elder boys playing at 'hockey,' or 'hurling,' as it is called in Ireland, just in the same way that it is played at home.

Of art, delineative or otherwise, the Turcoman has no notion whatever. I have shown the Gumush Tepé people drawings from the 'Illustrated London News' and 'Punch,' but the pictures failed to convey the slightest idea, unless, indeed, the spectator took up some absurd notion, utterly at variance with the object of the design. Still, they were never ceasing in their curiosity, and would gaze for hours and hours at a copy of 'Punch,' turned sideways or upside down—to them it was a matter of indifference which. I only remember one occasion upon which a Turcoman—old Agha Jik, who had obtained compensation from the thief who stole my horse-cloth—succeeded in discovering, in one

of Mr. Sambourne's allegorical cartoons in 'Punch,' the head of Mr. Gladstone. The right honourable gentleman is represented as a hermit crab, leaving the shell which served him as a former residence, and changing to a larger one—another constituency. 'This, I can see, is a man's head,' said the Turcoman; 'but what is this?' pointing to the body of the hermit crab. 'That,' said I, 'is a kind of fish.' 'Does it live in the water?' asked he. 'Yes,' I replied. 'Then,' observed he, 'this must be a *su-adam*' (a marine man). 'Just so,' I said, utterly wearied by my endeavours to explain, and having but little hope of bringing home to the minds of my hearers the political signification of the design. I afterwards heard Agha Jik explaining to his friends that, as I had been telling them that England was surrounded by water, doubtless when the population became very large some were obliged to live in the sea.

In the midst of such incidents as these, and in observing the manners and customs of these semi-savage people, I contrived to get through the long weary days in this out-of-the-way place beyond the Caspian. It was impossible to do any literary work during the day, and when after the final meal the family lay down to rest, and the venomous yelp of the jackals, answered by the deep baying of the village dogs, announced that the time for repose for the Turcomans had come, I felt relieved, as I could then be alone, follow out my thoughts, and commit them to paper. Thus occupied, I have sat on my carpet, beside the smoky *astatki* lamp, far into the small hours, and have lain down just as old Dourdi's wife was rising to commence grinding flour for the morning meal in her horizontal quern. At first, the sensation of lying upon the floor of one of these *kibitkas* is a very curious one. One's ear, in contact with the ground, brings to him all manner of murmurs and sounds from around, and he can hear the various conversations going

on in the neighbouring *kibitkas*, or the tramp of distant belated horsemen coming towards the village. Sometimes one wakes up suddenly, and by the dim, smouldering fire-light sees the centre and radiating ribs of the domed roof like some huge arachnoid polypus brooding above him, and stooping to grasp him in its outstretched tentacles. This was the form of nightmare which commonly oppressed me in my scanty hours of sleep in the *kibitka*.

## CHAPTER XV.

### GUMUSH TEPÉ TO ASTERABAD.

General Mouravieff—Night scene on the Giurgen—Embarking for Tchikislar—Wild fowl—Fishing stations—At sea—Wading ashore—Moullah Dourdi—The Grand Hotel—Colonel Malama—Discussion about the frontier—Timour Beg—Banished again—Back to Gumush Tepé—Smoking apparatus—Beer drinking and casuistry—An unnecessary call—A storm sky—The snow *tenkis*—Effects at Kenar Gez—The plains under snow—On the road to Asterabad—Cattle storm shelters—Dying sheep—Testing for blood—Turcomans camping—An improvised vehicle—A difficult ford—A camel in a difficulty—Swollen streams—Large mushrooms—Tortoises—Luxuriant grass growth—Suspected Turcomans—Muddy jungle—Wild boars.

I HAD been residing continuously at Gumush Tepé about three months, when some Turcomans who had returned with a lugger from Tchikislar brought me intelligence of the resignation of General Tergukasoff, and the appointment *ad interim*, to the command of the expeditionary forces, of Major-General Mouravieff. This change in the direction of affairs gave me some hope that I might after all be permitted to follow the operations of the Russian columns, and I determined to try my fortunes once more at the camp. I had considerable difficulty in inducing any of the Turcomans who ordinarily travelled to and fro between Gumush Tepé and Tchikislar with forage and wood supplies for the camp to allow me to accompany them, as they knew that since my last visit to the Russian lines I had underlain a ban, and that if I again essayed to return I should in all probability be summarily expelled. By dint of great persuasion, however, and the use of a good deal of diplomacy,

I succeeded in making them believe that it was necessary and permissible for me to have an interview with the new general, and, aided by the efforts of my host, I at length managed to discover the owner of a *lodka* who agreed to convey me along the coast to the Russian encampment.

It was a pitch dark night on March 4, 1880, a little over a year since I had arrived at Baku. The stars looked large and glittering in the inky sky—a phenomenon which I have often remarked in certain states of the atmosphere beyond the Caspian—as I stepped from the door of my *kibitka*, accompanied by old Dourdi, to embark on board the craft which he had found for me. He had been at great pains to secure trustworthy persons to convey me to the camp, for he was fearful about committing me to the care of the first person who offered, lest he, knowing that I was not in favour at the Russian head-quarters, should play me some trick *en voyage*. He was also anxious that I should return safely, especially as I had promised to bring back a new teapot for his wife, a brass one if such a thing could be found. Taking a stick two feet in length, and about an inch in diameter, he wrapped it with rags to a distance of six inches from the point, and, dipping it in the jar of black residual naphtha, or *astatki*, when saturated he rolled it in the ashes of the wood fire, and lighted it at the lamp. It blazed up, giving a lurid flame of a foot high, and we stepped out into the obscurity. We threaded our way along the river's edge, where the reed bundles mingled with the earth, and, propped up on the side next the water by rude piles and planking, formed a kind of quay, the elastic surface of which yielded to the foot like an asphalte roadway during very hot weather. As we went along the dogs rushed at us in their usual ferocious manner, and stray villagers appeared constantly out of the gloom, gazing suspiciously at us as we passed. People who are out in these parts at this time

of night are generally supposed to be on some errand which does not bode good to anyone. Then we reached a muddy creek, stretching a hundred yards from the river, in which were two or three luggers in course of construction, and which we crossed on planks laid over rough trestles such as are to be seen in dock excavation works. On the other side we found a dug-out canoe, into which we squeezed ourselves. Dourdi planted the flaming torch at one end of our fragile boat, and we shoved off into the dark river. It was a picturesque sight. The ripples, stirred by the prow, glittered in the yellow glare of the torch, which shot an uncertain, wavy light on the dusky outlines of the anchored *lodkas*, and on the black, alligator-like *täimuls* like our own, that moved silently by, each propelled, as ours was, by a single shovel-shaped paddle. The tall, dark figures of the boatmen, standing erect, seemed so many spectral forms gliding along the sable surface. We crossed the river obliquely, going towards a solitary *kibitka* lying a hundred yards lower down on the opposite side, from the open door of which proceeded the faint gleam of a lamp. A large one-masted lugger lay over on one side on the shelving muddy bank. We disembarked and entered the house. It was half full of hay and corn sacks awaiting transport to Tchikislar. A fire burned in the centre, and beside it, surrounded by nets and other fishing appurtenances, sat a woman, evidently of Persian race, with dark, strongly-marked, highly-arching eyebrows, large full eyes, and a general appearance which plainly denoted that she was no Turcoman. Seated in her lap was a child of some three or four years, clad in classically scanty raiment. As the flickering light fell upon her figure beside the dark shadows of the *kibitka* with Rembrandt-like effect, she would have made no bad model for a latter-day aquiline-featured Madonna. I sat for some time by the fire, ruminating over

the possible results of my coming trip until two young men came in. After some bargaining, it was agreed to accord me a passage to Tchikislar for the sum of five *krans* (four shillings), on condition that I supplied candles during the voyage. After a good deal of hauling and pushing, the lugger was set afloat, and I embarked. Besides myself there was a crew of three. It was about nine o'clock in the evening as, spreading our great lateen sail, we glided away down the long, winding, canal-like channel, here not more than forty paces wide, between low, swampy banks, overgrown with tamarisk bushes. As we left the glimmering lights of Gumush Tepé behind us, the clamour of wild fowl feeding in the marshes on either side reached our ears, and at intervals the noise of the frogs and toads sounded weirdly on the night. A mile down the river we came to a halt near an Armenian fishing station upon the left bank, to take in two passengers. Greatly to my surprise, I saw among those who came out of the *kibitka*, which served as a residence for the people employed at the fishing station, a Russian soldier in full uniform. Then we went on, as far as I could judge, for about a mile and a half, poling the *lodka* off the banks at the sharp turnings, then passing a wide estuary intersected with tree-grown islands, the commencement, probably, of a future delta; for, unlike the Atterek, the Giurgen has one continuous and navigable channel to the open sea. Here, again, were extensive fishing stations, and lights gleamed along the shore in a southerly direction. I was told that an extensive fishing village existed there. I stowed myself away under the forecastle, wrapped in my sheepskin mantle, after partaking of some tea made on a fire kindled in a shallow iron pan laid on flat bricks. I slept soundly, and it must have been about six o'clock in the morning when, after something like nine hours' passage, we anchored off the level shore of

Tchikislar. My companions told me that during the night they had had a good deal of tacking, the wind having shifted, and that they had been obliged to keep well out to sea, as the wind was off shore, and the waters were forced backwards and considerably reduced in depth. The sailors had brought with them some wild duck, pheasants, and vegetables, to be sold at the camp, where, they said, they were able to obtain for them a price at least four times as large as could be got in their own village. I was brought as near the shore as possible in a *täimul*, but, small as was the draught of this dug-out canoe, I was obliged to wade at least fifty yards through the surf before I reached what might reasonably be called land. The camp was still buried in slumber; probably if everyone had been about, as was the case later on, I should have been sent about my business immediately. None of the shops or booths were yet open, and I was forced for the moment to seek hospitality in the *kibitka* of an old acquaintance, the ex-pirate, Moullah Dourdi, who, true to the habits of his race, was up and stirring betimes. He had the reputation of being very rich, that is for a Turcoman, and to judge from the appearance of his house, crammed to the roof inside with tea-chests, rolls of calico, and other commodities, he seemed to be doing a thriving business. Somewhat later the denizens of the camp began to make their appearance, and the principal house of entertainment, a great rambling boarded structure with high-pitched roof, kept by an Italian sutler and known as the Grand Hotel, was opened. It was the place where a number of the staff officers boarded, and I was recognised by more than one as soon as I made my appearance at the breakfast-table. As soon as I could obtain an audience, I presented myself before my old friend Colonel Malama, the chief of staff, who still occupied the position he had held under General Lazareff. He looked

much aged and worn, short as was the time since I had last seen him, and I was not surprised at it, considering that he had been through the disastrous affair of the first attack on Geok Tepé, and had borne his full share of the responsibilities which the precipitate retreat from before that stronghold entailed. I asked him to tell General Mouravieff that I had come to make application to be allowed to remain at Tchikislar, and to follow the operations of the column, and he promised to do as I desired as soon as the General was visible. I spent the day in roving about the camp, and could perceive but little alteration in its general appearance, save that there was much less animation than when I had last been there, owing to the withdrawal of a large portion of the forces to the western side of the Caspian, where they had taken up quarters for the winter. The evening was enlivened by a rather hot discussion between myself and some engineer officers on the question of the actual boundary between Persia and the Russian trans-Caspian territory, one of them stoutly maintaining that the Atterek to its sources was, and could not but be, the legitimate boundary, and that which was laid down in treaties. It was scarce day-break on the following morning when I was aroused by a loud knocking at the door of the little alcove in which I slept. The major of a battalion, with whom I had formerly been on very friendly terms, accompanied by the chief of the camp police, a certain Timour Beg, a Mussulman lieutenant of cavalry, made their appearance, bearing an order from General Mouravieff that I should immediately quit the camp and return to Gumush Tepé, or any other place to which I might choose to proceed, provided I left the limits of the Russian lines. I asked permission to remain until I had eaten my breakfast, and then, accompanied by the same officers, I departed for the shore, where a *lodka*, specially

retained for my transport back to Gumush Tepé, was lying. The major was eager in his expressions of regret that I should be thus compelled to leave Tchikislar, and said how surprised he was to see me so treated, he having known me to be on such exceedingly good terms with the late General Lazareff and Generals Borch and Wittgenstein. It was not General Mouravieff's fault, he said. He was aware that a telegram had arrived in the camp on the previous evening, whether from Tiflis or St. Petersburg he did not know, in reply to one despatched by the General in relation to myself, and which contained a peremptory order to see that I left the place forthwith. A *täimul* brought me alongside of the lugger, and I found a sufficiently numerous body of passengers already aboard, some fifteen in all. We set sail about eight o'clock, and stowed ourselves away upon the rude ribs of the primitive craft, so as to be as much as possible out of the way of the bilge water that went uneasily to and fro. A smoking apparatus, in size and shape very like Highland bagpipes, was produced, and the general circulation of it from hand to hand commenced. We stood out for a couple of miles, until from our little craft we could only distinguish long streaks of low-lying coast, which, apart from occasional sand-hills, were only just enough to indicate land. Far away ahead the Persian mountains, like a blue dream, loomed to the southward. Our passage was favourable enough until towards evening, when the wind died away almost entirely, and sweeps had to be got out, by the aid of which we crawled along slowly enough. A couple of hours before sunset the breeze again sprang up, and we scudded away briskly before it. The company were very cheerful; most of them, apparently, to judge from their conversation, having been successful in their commercial transactions at the camp. Many of them indulged in such un-Mussulman-like refreshment as bottled Kazan beer, pur-

chased at the drink-shops of Tchikislar, doubtless not thinking themselves less obedient to the teachings of the Koran on that account. The more lax Mussulmans always excuse themselves for excessive indulgence in vodka, arrack, and brandy, on the plea that wine only is forbidden by Mahomet. We had a moullah on board, who was piously demonstrative, saying his prayers with the greatest persistence during the greater portion of the voyage; and though we were sitting crowded together in a narrow space, almost touching each other, he would insist upon putting his open hands behind his jaws as the *muezzims* do, and calling the faithful to prayer, as if all who had it in their power to respond had not been at his elbow.

I did not like the appearance of the sky as we entered the mouth of the Giurgen. There were meteoric-looking clouds athwart the sun, and that angry glare over the waters which in this part of the world heralds a tempest. The wind again fell, and a dead calm ensued. The lugger had to be rowed and poled almost the entire distance between the mouth of the river and the village. A fierce yellow storm-light was on the *lodka* masts, and angry red streaks shone over the looming snow-clad Elburz. The leaden waters of the Giurgen slept 'stilly black,' the sun went down, and the call of the *muezzim*, like that of some storm demon, arose upon the ominous silence pervading land and sky. I had not been more than a few minutes on shore when the scudding mist-drift made its appearance along the western horizon, and before long the tempest was upon us. It was fortunate for us that we got on shore so soon. The storm struck the village with greater force than I had yet seen. The cattle galloped wildly about, the camels straggling here and there with their awkward run, stiffly brandishing their tails. The evening sky forcibly reminded me of a tornado scene which I once witnessed in St. Louis,

Missouri, and the roaring noise of the wind and rain that swept over the village brought the same storm still more vividly back to my memory. Ere long it was pitch dark, and general confusion reigned throughout Gumush Tepé. The naphtha torches flared in every direction. Ropes and poles were hurriedly brought into requisition, and the universal hubbub, mingled with the noise of the storm, gave the place the appearance of being the scene of some unearthly combat. These sudden storms from the sea are of such frequent occurrence that I wondered why permanent precautions were not taken against their ever-recurring violence. When I asked old Dourdi why he did not always keep his *kibitka* tied down with ropes, and plant poles to support the structure against the fury of the wind, instead of removing all the fastenings the moment the tempest had passed by, he frankly told me that if he were to leave his tackling for a single night outside, it would disappear before morning—a good and cogent reason for placing it in security within. This storm was one of the worst that had happened for some time, and I could not help congratulating myself and my fellow-passengers upon having got ashore before its fury burst upon us, for I am certain that if such had not been the case not one of us would have reached land. Some miles to the south, at the station of Kenar Gez, the Persian custom-house—not, it is true, a very solid building—was unroofed and completely wrecked, and three men were drowned. The wooden pier was broken in two, and several small vessels were driven ashore. This storm, unlike the others which had occurred during my stay in these parts, was not of short duration. It continued with unceasing violence during the greater part of the night. Towards midnight it was accompanied by hail and a heavy snowfall. When I looked out in the morning the sun was shining brightly over a vast gleaming

expanse of virgin snow. I had never before seen the plains thus covered. It is singular that, while during the months of January and February the weather had been comparatively mild and warm, it should at this late period turn so bitterly cold, and that we should be plunged, as it were, into the depth of winter. The snow-fall must have been excessively heavy, for it was fully six inches deep out in the open. It was drifted in great banks against every obstacle in the course of the wind, and piled high against the *kibitkas*. Everyone was at work sweeping the snow from the felt roofing, and clearing pathways from door to door. The dogs, for a wonder, were undemonstrative, and cowered in sheltered corners out of the reach of the cutting blast that whistled and moaned through the village. Never have I seen so sudden and striking a transformation, in so brief a period, over the whole face of the country.

Finding that my last chance of again being allowed to take up my quarters in the Russian camp had departed, I decided to return to Asterabad, there to consult with my friend Mr. Churchill as to what course I ought to pursue, and I took advantage of the setting out for the same place of a Turcoman who had been acting as agent for the British Consul at that city, and who was going in with his usual fortnightly report of the movements of the Russians. For obvious reasons I refrain from giving the name of this courier. On the morning following the storm, accompanied by this man and my servant, I took the usual route towards Kara Suli Tepé, from which point the road turned in a south-easterly direction towards Oum Shali, one of the principal points at which Turcomans going and coming between Asterabad and Gumush Tepé cross the Giurgen river. Far away out on the plain, with not a bush a foot high to shelter us against the piercing wind, I could fully realise the value of a Turcoman sheepskin *kusgun*, and of

the extra length of sleeve which I could snugly double over my hand. The cold was not so excessive that one need complain of it, but the keen wind, sweeping unimpeded over these vast solitudes, lent to it a bitterness which must be felt to be appreciated. The plain stretching between Gumush Tepé and Kara Suli Tepé is mainly uninhabited, being near enough to the village to allow of the camels and herds being sent to pasture early in the morning, and brought home at night, but beyond the latter place a scene truly characteristic of the Steppes came under my observation. Here, at intervals of four or five miles, are small groups of *kibitkas*, each group consisting of from ten to twenty dwellings, and placed with a view to the grazing of the numerous flocks and herds ordinarily scattered over the plain. The inhabitants of these huts were now to be met with in every direction, camped in small groups here and there, as far as the eye could reach. When the snow *tenkis* swept over them they had bethought themselves of their sheep and lambs, distributed for miles round under the guardianship of a few shepherds, and exposed to all the fury of the wintry blast. Knowing from experience the fatal results of these visitations, they had hurried out to parry, as best they might, the disastrous effects of the *tenkis* upon their flocks, and everywhere were to be seen shelters, rapidly constructed out of the first material that came to hand. In these outlying villages one sees, at all seasons of the year, a number of objects whose destination had more than once sorely puzzled me. These were fascines of giant reeds, twenty feet long, eighteen inches thick at one extremity, where the butts of the reeds were together, and half that thickness at the other end, where the plumy tops were bound together in a point. I now saw to what use they were put. The earth had been cut slopingly, deepening gradually from the surface to a depth of about

three feet, and then abruptly scarped. The excavated earth was thrown up in the form of a parapet, and solidly beaten. This parapet was next the wind, the sloping ditch which led down to it being in the opposite direction, and the entire line at right angles to the direction of the storm. The reed fascines were laid sloping, at an angle of forty-five degrees, across the top of this parapet, their thick ends being buried in the earth, and firmly secured in position by stakes, so that the plumy extremities of the reeds were pointed in the direction towards which the wind blew. Under cover of the parapet and the sloping roof formed by the fascines the flocks crowded together, and were thus to a certain extent secured against the effects of the blast, and the more or less vertically falling snow and hail. A screen of this description afforded passable shelter from the extreme violence of the storm, sufficient for the stronger animals, such as camels, cows, and full-grown sheep, to a distance of thirty or forty feet from the parapet, while the young lambs and kids cowered close down in the cutting. In some instances there had not been time to erect these parapets, and the fascines were supported in the necessary position by horizontal poles, reaching from top to top of stout stakes driven vertically into the ground. Where these fascines were not prepared for use, the villagers had brought out their quilts and felt floor-cloths, which, attached to wooden bars such as I have described, and held in a vertical position by stakes driven through their lower edges, gave a limited shelter to the portion of the flocks least able to bear the inclemency of the weather. These precautions, however, had apparently come too late, to a great extent, for on every side were strewn dead and dying lambs and sheep. Men with long knives were going from one prostrate animal to another, cutting their throats to see if blood would flow. In case it did, however slightly, the carcass was

taken to the village to be consumed as food; but, if no blood came, the flesh was abandoned to the village dogs, and to the wolves and jackals, who would invariably make their appearance as the sun sank below the horizon. The number of animals who perished in this snow *tenkis*, to judge from my observations of the limited space over which I rode, must have been enormous.

As we moved further eastward, the snow diminished very perceptibly, and when we reached the usual fording-place on the Giurgen, at Oum Shali, it had almost entirely disappeared. Even at this early season of the year the mid-day hours were exceedingly warm. We tried in vain to find a fording-place at this point. The waters were beginning to rise, and it would have been very hazardous to risk the attempt. We accordingly pushed on five or six miles further to the east, until nearly abreast with the old Persian fortress of Mehemet Giurgen, on the southern bank of the river, where it makes a sudden bend to the southward. Here we found Il Geldi Khan, the Turcoman chief of whom I have spoken as accompanying me overland to Tchikislar. He was engaged in shifting one of his villages to a more favourable pasture ground. A considerable portion of the *kibitkas* and household materials were on the ground, and the remainder were gradually arriving. In this part of the world there are no wheeled vehicles. The nearest approach to a vehicle of any kind which I saw was a cylindrical wicker basket like a gabion, about four feet in length and two and a half feet in diameter, open at each extremity. Through the centre of one of the sides had been thrust a lance, and a man, mounted upon a tall Turcoman horse, his wife seated behind him, held the other extremity of the weapon in his hand, thereby drawing the basket after him. In it were a quantity of hay, and some lesser household goods and chattels. Baskets of the same kind were to

be seen at intervals, placed upright upon one end. These were the field mangers for the horses, and they prevented the hay from being swept away by the wind, as would have been the case had it remained unprotected. The household effects were carried on the backs of camels, the men and women riding on horseback. All around stood the wooden skeletons of *kibitkas*, not yet covered with felt, and looking exactly like so many gigantic parrot cages. Women in their bright coloured garments were, as usual, hard at work erecting the dwellings; the men sat idly about, smoking their water-pipes, and chatting, their rifles and muskets lying in symmetrical rows on the ground near them. Even at this point, which is considered the safest of all at which to cross the river, it was by no means an easy task to get to the opposite side. A guide, sent by Il Geldi Khan, and mounted on a very tall camel, led the way, the animal proceeding obliquely up the stream, feeling the bottom carefully with its great cushioned feet to make sure that he did not slide from the kind of ridge which at that point rendered the river fordable. It is very dangerous to attempt the ford without a guide; and, even when the river is easily passable, the steep and slippery banks of yellow loam present a serious obstacle. I succeeded in getting over, my horse once completely losing his footing, and going quite under water, to the no small detriment of the contents of my saddle-bags. Arrived at the other side, he managed with great difficulty to struggle up the steep bank, but when near the top, which was about twenty-five feet above the surface of the river, he again lost his footing, and slid back into the stream. I had at length to dismount in water waist deep, and scramble up on all fours, plastering myself all over with sticky loam. The camel which carried the guide, thanks to its long legs, got well across the stream, but failed utterly to climb the bank. Several times, by creep-

ing on its knees, it mounted ten or twelve feet, but then, becoming tired, lay down with its neck stretched out like an enormous snail, and in this position glided backwards inch by inch into the water, where it stood uttering dissatisfied growls, such as can only proceed from the mouth of a camel. The guide was to have accompanied us in the direction of Asterabad, but in consequence of the sheer impossibility of getting his camel up the bank, we perforce moved on without his company.

Though no snow was visible on the southern side of the river, a fact which was doubtless owing to its having disappeared before the rays of the hot afternoon sun, we constantly met with the dead bodies of sheep, lambs, and kids, many of them in a very mangled condition by reason of the ravages of the wolves, jackals, and dogs. Finding myself unable to reach Asterabad the same night, I stayed at a gathering of *kibitkas* situated about two hours' ride from the town, and at the northern edge of the jungle. There had been heavy rains during the preceding fortnight, and the rivers and streams everywhere were gradually beginning to fill. Even the Kara-Su, which is usually but a series of swamps united by insignificant rivulets, was now a very respectable river, and quite unfordable. At the village it was spanned by a very rickety extempore bridge of tree-trunks and branches. In the proximity of this stream, which falls into the sea at Kenar Gez, mushrooms covered the ground in every direction, some being as large as a dinner plate. At first I was very chary about making use of them, but, seeing the inhabitants eat them freely, I tried them also, and found them excellent. They are precisely the same in flavour as those eaten in England. I had often noticed immense quantities of them along the Giurgen, near Gumush Tepé, but, owing to their enormous size, had taken it for granted that they were inedible. For half a

*kran* one can purchase a quantity which would fill up and pile an ordinary wash-hand basin. Large numbers of young tortoises crept about everywhere, and immense growths of dandelion flourished in the same locality. The grass and reed growth along this southerly portion of the plain, extending between the Giurgen and the Kara-Su, is exceedingly luxuriant, owing to the excellent water supply combined with the heat of the sun, and I am much surprised that the nomads do not frequent the district more than they do. Possibly they fear to be in too close proximity to the central administration at Asterabad, a position which would greatly facilitate the extracting from them of additional funds by the local authorities. I passed the night in a *kibitka* placed at the disposal of myself and my servant, as it seemed to be understood that we would not trust ourselves alone with any of the village people during the night. They belonged to the Ata-bai Turcomans, and were a peculiar subdivision of that tribe which bore a very bad character indeed. They were held responsible for certain Persians who had disappeared, shortly before our arrival, while endeavouring to cross this portion of the plain.

Early in the morning I took my departure, riding by a narrow path through the pomegranate and thorn jungle. The snow, which had here lodged in great quantities, had melted, and the loamy mud was fully eighteen inches deep, rendering the path all but impassable. Weary hours of wading were spent in getting through this chaos. We passed several fortified Persian villages, situated within clearings, one of them occupying the summit of one of the ancient tepés, or hills. It probably presented an exact picture of what each of the other hills dotting the plain to the northward was when the district was inhabited. On every side were wild-boar tracks, and from time to time, as we sought to avoid the muddy ditch along which we were

riding, by turning aside into the field, we saw parties of from five to six boars, with their broods, go crashing suddenly before us, away into the depths of the thickets. It was nearly two o'clock in the afternoon as, thoroughly tired out, I drew bridle at the gate of the British Consulate in Asterabad.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ROUND THE PLAINS BY AK-KALA.

A troublesome servant—Mehemedabad—Camp at Nergis Tepé—Afghan escort—Cattle scenting blood—Porcupines—Offending a moullah—Bridge over Kara-Su—Old town of Giurgen—Modern fort—Seat of Kadjar family—Persian artillerymen and sharpshooters—Ak-Kala bridge—Turcoman *medressés*—View from the ramparts—Firing at a Turcoman—Persian military prestige—A humorous moullah—Verses on a mantelpiece—Paring an epistle—Banks of the Giurgen—Camels shedding winter coats—Triple chain of mounds—Oum Shali—Pheasants and partridges—A hungry wolf—Lost in the reed brakes—Stranded fish—Overflow of Giurgen—Curing fish—Wood turners—A Kurd gallant—Matron's indignation—Plans for the future—Russian threats—Saddling for Asterabad—Dangers of the road—Goklan 'no tax' movement—Putrescent fish—A mutual misunderstanding—Wild boars and jackals—Passage of swollen Giurgen by cattle—Lunch with the nomads—Victims of the *tenkis*—Arrival at Asterabad—News of Skobeleff—Mr. Zinovieff—Journey to Teheran decided on.

I REMAINED some days at Asterabad, enjoying the kind hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Churchill at the British Consulate, and endeavouring to recuperate my energies after the Turcoman *régime* to which I had so long been subjected at Gumush Tepé, and I then undertook an expedition to the Persian border fort of Ak-Kala, on the banks of the Giurgen. This is the only point at which the stream is spanned by a bridge, and where, consequently, it can be crossed at all seasons. As it is at all times hazardous for one or two persons to trust themselves out in these plains, and especially so at a time like that of which I am speaking, when all manner of miscreants were abroad, I decided to proceed first to the Persian camp of Nergis Tepé and try

to procure an escort. Accompanied by my servant, an Armenian from Erivan, who had come with me from Tchikislar after Lazareff's death, I rode northward towards the fortified village of Mehemedabad, situated some miles off, in the midst of the jungle. During this journey the misconduct of my servant greatly annoyed and inconvenienced me. He was exceedingly cowardly by nature, and, with the view of drowning his fears of the dangers which he anticipated meeting with in the jungle, had partaken very freely of the deleterious spirit here called arrack, and during the ride he continued to help himself from the bottle to such an extent that he became quite drunk, or at least pretended to be so. He was cruelly maltreating the horse which he rode, beating him savagely between the ears with a heavy riding whip, all the time scarcely able to keep his saddle. I several times ordered him to desist, but he paid no attention to me, and finally became very insolent. He said he would go no further, and, turning his horse's head towards Asterabad, proceeded to ride away in that direction, carrying with him all my baggage. I shouted to him to come back, and, drawing my revolver, threatened to fire if he did not obey. He took no notice of my threat, and I was obliged to gallop after him. Seizing his horse's bridle, I commanded him to dismount. He tried to strike me with the butt of his whip, but I avoided the blow, and, immediately dismounting, seized him by the heel of one boot, and threw him from the saddle into the mud, where I left him wallowing.

Remounting, I took the second horse by the bridle, and rode on alone to Mehemedabad, which was close by. Some of the inhabitants, mounted upon the ramparts, had been witnesses of the scene, and were under the impression that I had killed my servant. However, even if I had done so it would have created but little astonishment, such things

being quite in the order of the day in this neighbourhood; and as I entered the gateway of their fortalice they only crowded curiously about me, asking what the man had done. I told them that he was drunk and insolent, that he refused to accompany me, and that he tried to bolt back to Asterabad with my effects; that I had thrown him from his horse; and that they would doubtless find him asleep where I left him, in the middle of the muddy roadway. I then inquired if there were anyone present who would be good enough to guide me to the Persian camp at Nergis Tepé, promising to reward him handsomely. There seemed to be some hesitation at first, but at length one young fellow stepped forward and volunteered to go with me. I made him mount the second horse, and we plunged into a labyrinth of mingled morass and jungle, leading up to the edge of the Kara-Su, which we forded with some difficulty, and a quarter of an hour's further ride brought us to the camp. Here I dismissed my guide, with a present of some pieces of money, and went at once to General Veli Khan, who was kind enough to place a tent at my service. I passed the day at the camp, sleeping there the same evening. Next morning, General Mustapha Khan, commanding the entire forces, and Governor of Asterabad, kindly furnished me with an escort of eight horsemen, who were to conduct me to Ak-Kala, about four hours' ride to the north-eastward. These horsemen were descendants of members of the Afghan colony founded around Asterabad by Nadir Shah on his return from the conquest of India. There are, I believe, six or seven hundred of them in all attached to the government of Asterabad. They are for the most part Mahometans of the Sunnite sect.

We struck out in an easterly direction, across a perfectly level plain, covered with short crisp grass, similar to

that seen upon our downs, there being a sprinkling of tamarisk and camel-thorn here and there. Cattle in large numbers were browsing over the plain, and a singular instance of animal instinct came under my observation. One of our party had brought down a partridge which had risen just in front of him, and, the bird being considerably mangled, its blood fell upon the turf. One of the party at the same moment dismounted to arrange his saddle-girths, and during our halt a herd of small, dark-coloured cows were driven up by a shepherd. They were walking quietly, but when the foremost arrived at the spot where the blood of the partridge had been spilled, she sniffed its odour with dilated nostrils, lowing plaintively. Several others gathered round her, acting similarly, and then they all set off in a mad gallop, with outstretched and stiffened tails, circling round the spot. This manœuvre they repeated several times, lowing as before when they smelt the blood. As we continued our way I noticed a great number of porcupine quills lying about, the quills of each animal being all on one spot, just where the body had decomposed. The Mussulmans consider this animal unclean, and I recollect once giving great offence to a moullah by indicating a place upon a map with a porcupine quill.

We recrossed the Kara-Su river on a tall bridge of several arches, over which the causeway of Shah Abass the Great passed. The bridge was a fairly substantial structure, and at either extremity of it was a tall brick obelisk painted white, to guide approaching travellers, and to act as beacons in the midst of the dangerous morasses which flanked the river at this point. After this we turned directly to the northward, and soon came in view of Ak-Kala.

Ak-Kala is about thirty miles from the seashore, on the banks of the Giurgen, and about three hours' ride north of

Asterabad. It is a Persian military station on the real frontier—for the Giurgen is the practical limit of the kingdom on this side. The place is an interesting one from a historical point of view. It was formerly named Giurgen, and up to a century ago was a flourishing and populous town. It was the head-quarters of one of the two rival branches of the great Kadjar family to which the reigning dynasty belongs. The second branch had its centre at Asterabad. After a series of bloody struggles the Asterabad family succeeded in asserting its supremacy, and the destruction of Giurgen followed. The ruins of the town consist of a crumbling wall of sun-baked brick, flanked by numerous towers, enclosing an oblong space five or six hundred yards in length by four hundred in breadth. Within are confused heaps of earth, tile, and rubbish, indicating the sites of the former dwellings. Vultures and buzzards sit all day long on these melancholy mounds; and the snake and jackal shelter among the sparse brambles. Outside the walls are traces of vast encampments—probably those of besieging armies; and the dry bed of an ancient canal, which brought water to the place from the Kara-Su, still remains. This means of supply had to be adopted, for though one end of the town touches the banks of the Giurgen river, the great depth to which the stream has excavated its bed, and the vertical nature of the sides, rendered it difficult and tedious to furnish a whole population by the process of hoisting water in buckets. The modern fort of Ak-Kala (the White Fort) occupies the site of the ancient citadel in the north-eastern corner of the old town. It is about 150 yards square. At each corner is a brick bastion. The curtain walls are of unbaked brick, and in a very ruinous condition. In some places the footbank has crumbled away to such an extent that only a few inches in breadth remain, and making the

circuit of the *enceinte* is a perilous affair. In designing the loopholes great regard seems to have been had for the safety of the defenders, the openings being in size and shape what would be formed by thrusting an ordinary broomstick through a fresh mud wall. On each bastion is mounted an old-fashioned bronze 12-pounder, beside which stands a wild-looking artilleryman in a tattered blue calico tunic faced with red cotton braid, and wearing a huge shaggy hat of brown sheepskin like that of a Turcoman. A colonel commanded the post. He had under his orders five or six hundred nondescript soldiers, some of whom carried old smooth-bore muskets. A select company was armed with enormously long rifles of Persian manufacture, having attached a fork support as a rest, like the mediæval arquebuses. The tall brick bridge spanning the river has four arches, and its northern end is protected by a ruined barbican. On the north side of the river are extensive remains of the old town, or rather its suburbs, all of unbaked brick. In their midst is a large modern brick house, built by a former governor of the fort. From the ramparts the eye ranges over an immense expanse of plain, unbroken save by an occasional group of Turcoman huts, and the colossal remains of the entrenchments along the so-called Alexander's wall, which here runs parallel to the Giurgen at a distance of from two to three miles to the north. Within sight are three *medressés*, or collegiate institutions, for the instruction of Turcoman students for the priesthood. These are some of the few permanent structures I have ever seen among the nomads. They are built of large flat heavy bricks taken from the Kizil Alan and its old forts. They are generally square buildings, forty feet on either side, two stories high, with a sloping broad-eaved roof of red tiles, the latter also derived from the ancient ruins. All these different objects, by an optical illusion, seem of enormous

size, and floating, cut off from earth in the trembling opal mirage.

I am not aware whether up to the present any systematic excavations have been made in these old entrenchments and mounds; but I think that such ought to well repay the trouble. Even the chance excavations made for the purposes of interment by the Turcomans, for they always choose elevated sites for such purposes, bring to light pieces of silver money and ancient pottery of the Alexandrian period. Forty or fifty miles to the southward rose, tier over tier, the huge ridges of the Elburz chain of mountains, then covered with snow almost to their base. Nestling at their foot, half hidden by the dense forest growth around, the towers of Asterabad were faintly visible; and here and there gigantic columns of dense black smoke rose into the still air, until their heads appeared like clouds in the sunlight. These proceeded from the vast reed and cane brakes burned by the peasantry in order to dislodge the numerous wild boars who work such havoc in the rice-fields, both when the crop is springing and when it is at maturity. After sunset the gates of the fort are carefully barred, and, unless in considerable bodies, none of the garrison ever venture outside the walls. A kind of undeclared war is the normal state of things here between the Turcomans and Persians, deliberate assassinations, perpetrated by either party as it happens to be momentarily stronger, being of frequent occurrence. As an instance of the kind of feeling which exists, the following incident, which took place as I was on my way to Ak-Kala, will suffice.

I was accompanied, as I have said, from the Persian camp on the Kara-Su by an escort of eight cavalry. When well out in the plain we saw approaching a Turcoman cavalier, coming along at the easy swinging gallop which the horses of this country will maintain for hours without fatigue. When

the horseman was within a couple of hundred yards of us on our left, a young Persian who accompanied me drew his revolver, and, cursing the Turcoman as a Kaffir and a son of *Shaitan*, deliberately fired four shots at him. The Turcoman, apparently without heeding, kept on his way until, passing by our rear, he was about four hundred yards on our right, close to his village. He then unslung his long gun, and sent a bullet whistling and screeching in uncomfortable proximity to our heads. Whereupon some of the escort fired at him repeatedly, he returning the compliment three times, each time with bullets which came quite close to us. We and he being in motion, and the distance being so considerable, the danger of a bullet telling was of course very small, but the whole thing shows the spirit of the mutual relations between the two peoples. This same Persian who commenced the affair with his revolver, would have been far from exhibiting such a truculent spirit had he been alone or accompanied by only a couple of his countrymen. On one occasion I remarked to him that I thought it rather risky to have drawn off the entire army to such a distance from Asterabad, as a thousand or so of Turcomans might easily surprise and sack the town during the absence of its defenders. 'A thousand!' he exclaimed. 'A hundred would be sufficient to do that, and to put the whole Persian army to flight as well. The Turcomans never turn their backs; we do.' What he said was not far from the truth, and it shows that Persian military prestige is not high, even among themselves.

The 'sertib' (lieutenant-colonel) Lutfveli Khan, commanding the place, received myself and my young Persian companion very kindly, and conducted us over the fort. It was with great difficulty that we were able to pass some of the broken portions of the ramparts, worn down by rainfalls into precipitous gullies and inclined planes. The

Colonel gravely informed us that His Majesty the Shah had given orders that these defects should be repaired, and that doubtless some of these days they would be. I was much amused by seeing this officer stalking gravely along, followed by two mysterious acolytes, one of whom concealed under his sizeable mantle a bottle of arrack, the other carrying a set of those hemispherical brass drinking-cups peculiar to Persia. Whenever we got into some convenient place of retirement, such as the interior of one of the flanking bastion towers, the bottle and cups were deftly produced, and the forbidden liquor circulated freely. The Colonel told me that he was weary of his lonesome post out here on the edge of the wilderness, and that he did not care how soon he was recalled. I asked him whether the Turcomans ever menaced him in his position, but he replied that the garrison were too much on their guard, and that, besides the fear the desert horsemen had of his pieces of artillery, they would gain but little even if they succeeded in capturing the place.

The northern side of the old town of Giurgen, one angle of the site of which is occupied by the fort of Ak-Kala, rested directly upon the river itself, the banks of which here go sheer down from the base of the walls. The ordinary level of the water cannot be less than thirty-five feet below the surface of the plain, and is entirely inaccessible, except at certain points, where zigzag paths have been cut in order to enable cattle to descend. At the time of my visit the Giurgen was gradually rising, and the Colonel informed me that a few days previously two of his men were drowned while bathing a little above the bridge. At sundown he entertained us at dinner, and we had the company of a very amusing priest, who, after chanting the regulation call to prayers, in the cracked, quavering voice which for some reason, best known to themselves, the Shiite

*muezzims* adopt on these occasions, and which contrasts so unfavourably with the full, rich, and really melodious tones of the Turcoman crier, partook very liberally of arrack, and entertained the company with Persian comic songs. One of these, the gist of which I could not make out, seemed to the Colonel so exquisitely ludicrous, that he was compelled to lie back upon his carpet and grasp his stomach as he shook in every limb with convulsive laughter. The dinner over, and a few more brazen cups of arrack emptied, we retired, as is the custom in Persia, to our sleeping apartments. The Colonel occupied a large and spacious *kibitka* on a wide platform above one of the northern gates. My chamber was in a permanent brick edifice not far off. I remarked a curious verse of poetry which was inscribed upon the mantelpiece in this apartment. It was written in Persian, in a very neat hand, above the centre of the fireplace, and was to the following effect:—'We are here gathered in company around the fire, like moths around a flame; the moths sometimes scorch themselves; this fire is the flame, we are the moths.' The writer did not state whether or not he had scorched himself on the occasion of his writing.

While I was at Ak-Kala a large number of letters arrived for the Colonel, and I saw repeated a process which I had often before noticed at Asterabad—the curious way in which his *mirza*, or secretary, prepared each of them for perusal. He cut off the extra paper, and having trimmed the whole neatly round with a pair of scissors, handed them to the Colonel to read. This appears to be an indispensable preliminary ceremony to the reading of a letter by any person pretending to a certain dignity.

On the following morning my young Persian acquaintance and the escort returned to the Persian camp, while I, accompanied by a new servant whom I had hired there,

crossed the bridge over the Giurgen, and, following the northern bank, directed my course towards Gumush Tepé. On all sides, and reaching away to the horizon, were large groups of *kibitkas*, the Turcomans taking advantage of the advent of the young spring grass to pasture their herds. I was not wholly free from apprehensions as, one by one, we passed these groups of nomads, and I cast many an anxious glance behind me as I left the precincts of each. I may here say that my object in returning to the *aoull* of Gumush Tepé by this particular route was to verify the statements that had been made to me about large numbers of camels being brought together in the inter-fluvial plain to be held in readiness for the service of the Russian expeditionary column. I wished, also, to examine the formation of the river bank between Ak-Kala and the sea, for previously I had only seen that portion of it which lay between Nergis Tepé and the Caspian. As regards the river banks, I found that along the entire distance they were of the same steep nature, but gradually diminishing in height towards the sea-coast; that the water level was accessible only at certain points, and at these only with difficulty. That there was an unusual gathering of camels north of the Giurgen there was no difficulty in perceiving; and, moreover, I could verify the statement made by the Ata-bai Turcomans, when refusing for the moment to supply camels for the Russian transport, that at this season their animals were not in a condition to work, and that any attempt to force them to do so would cause their death or disablement. In the early spring, out on these plains, the camel sheds its coat. Those which composed the herds which I met at short intervals were really most unsightly-looking objects. Their great ragged winter coats had partially fallen from their backs, or hung in tatters upon them, leaving the skin beneath bare, black, and sodden-looking. They looked, in

fact, as if they had been half boiled. The entire plain was covered with clots of camel hair, which children with baskets were engaged in collecting, probably with the view of having it spun into threads for weaving purposes.

Between Ak-Kala and the sea there is a very large number of ancient mounds, forming a complete triple chain; and in many instances the great broad, shallow ditches which sometimes surround their bases were filled with water from the late rain and snow storm. I crossed the Tchikislar-Asterabad telegraph line opposite the Persian camp, lying south of the river at Nergiş Tepé, traversed unmolested the large village where, on journeying the first time from Tchikislar to Asterabad, I had been obliged to have recourse to my revolver to drive off the savage dogs, and drew near the *aoull* of Oum Shali towards mid-day. The name of this place means, literally, the 'corn road,' *oum*, in the Tartar language, signifying 'a road,' and *shali* a poor species of brownish corn used chiefly for feeding horses. A considerable extent of ground was under cultivation, this fact being due, I believe, to the ready and profitable market found for cereals in the neighbouring Russian camp. I have no doubt that, were ready transport available, the whole of these vast plains would speedily be covered by the Turcomans with similar crops. Up to that time they had been in the habit of producing only as much grain as was absolutely necessary for themselves and their horses. Beyond Oum Shali are extensive fields of giant reeds, which are generally about fifteen feet high. Almost at every step pheasants (*karagöol*), partridges (*kaklik*), and a singular silvery gray bird like a moorhen, called by the Turcomans *birveltek*, sprang up before us.

Among these reed growths I had the first opportunity since my arrival in Persia of seeing a wolf. He was feeding upon the carcass of a sheep which had either been killed by

the late storms or which he had himself carried off. His head was buried in its entrails, but, looking up as I approached, he eyed me savagely, his muzzle smeared with blood. I fired, and apparently touched him, for I could see the fur fly from his back, whereupon he charged me fiercely. My horse trembled with fright, rendering it very difficult to aim. On the second shot the enemy turned tail, and ran to a distance of about a hundred yards, where he seated himself, and, licking his bloody jaws, gazed at me as though he would say, 'When you think fit to go, I will resume my meal.'

Noticing that half a dozen pheasants which rose close to us had settled in the reeds some little distance to the right, we pushed our way towards them, finding the utmost difficulty in forcing a passage through the brake. The plumy summits of these reeds far overtopped our heads, even as we sat on horseback, and it was utterly impossible to do more than guess in what direction we were going. We could not discover the pheasants, and, when we tried to return, found that we had lost our way. For fully half an hour we stumbled about, crashing and smashing among the reeds, and at last I began to think seriously of setting fire to them, as the only chance of getting out of the labyrinth in which we were involved. Fortunately, however, we struck upon a narrow boar path, following which we came to a large clearing, in the midst of which was a shallow pool, evidently a gathering place for the boars. From this point paths led in every direction, and, choosing one of them, in twenty minutes we emerged into a comparatively open space, though far from the road from which we had strayed.

As I drew near Kara Suli Tepé, the last mound intervening between me and Gumush Tepé, I noticed at least fifty or sixty vultures and eagles at a tremendous altitude, soaring and wheeling above a point close to the mound. A

great number of sea-gulls were also flying to and fro. On approaching, the ground seemed covered, in places, with some white material, which at a distance resembled oyster-shells. Running close by Kara Suli Tepé, and emptying itself into the Giurgen, is a second Kara-Su—for the Turcomans seem to give this name to nearly every small stream. Its bed and the banks on either side were completely covered with fish of various kinds, some of them, still alive, floundering and splashing in the little water which lay in pools among the muddy banks. The greater portion, however, were dead, and putrefying in the sun. Within a hundred yards of the bed of the stream these fish were lying three and four deep. Their numbers must have been immense. It was the presence of this food that had attracted all the vultures, eagles, and aquatic birds. It appears that during my absence in Asterabad one of the usual spring overflows of the Giurgen had taken place. The waters had extended into the bed of the Kara-Su, flooding a considerable tract of country on either side, and subsiding as suddenly as they had risen. Hence the stranding of these vast quantities of fish. Several Turcomans, with camels and horses, were carrying away basketfuls of them. They are split open, slightly salted, and dried in the sun.

Old Dourdi, as well as everyone else, was surprised to see me back again at Gumush Tepé so soon. I noticed considerable uneasiness on the part of my old host, and was quite at a loss to account for it. Several times he seemed about to communicate something to me, but on each occasion he checked himself, so that I did not press him to tell me what was on his mind. My stay at Gumush Tepé was not protracted—principally because everything seemed stagnant at Tchikislar for the time being, and also because I had no fresh observations to make in the village. I find in my note-book only a few jottings relating to this, my last visit

to Gumush Tepé. One is to the effect that the wood-turners who caused the article in process of manufacture to revolve by drawing backwards and forwards a bow the loose string of which was passed once round a wooden cylinder on the axle, directed the chisel partly by grasping it with the great toes of both feet, and partly with the disengaged hand. Another note refers to the new servant whom I hired at the Persian camp. He was by birth a Kurd from Budjnoord, on the Atterek, and a Sunnite Mussulman. Contrary to Mahomedan usage, he wore all his hair, which curled upwards in a heavy roll all round from under the edges of his orthodox Persian hat of black Astrakan wool, and was accurately divided down the centre, for he affected the dress and style of a Teheran dandy. He was about twenty-four years of age, very good looking, and a devoted admirer of the fair sex. He was continually getting me into trouble, for, instead of looking after my horses, he was ever perambulating the village, and thrusting himself unbidden into the Turcoman houses wherever he saw a pretty maiden. Over and over again was he chased from the *kibitkas* for misconducting himself; and once he rushed breathlessly into old Dourdi's dwelling pursued by an enraged elderly matron who brandished a lighted stick, which she had snatched from the fire for want of a better weapon, and who came to me to make dire complaints about the undue liberties he had been taking with her daughter, and that, too, in the face of everybody. I was advised to keep him at home, or that otherwise he would some fine day have a knife stuck into him.

Despairing of obtaining permission to accompany the Russian columns, and tired of the inactive and unprofitable life that I was leading, I determined to stay no longer at Gumush Tepé, but to return to Asterabad, and thence try to make my way along the southern bank of the Giurgen

through the Goklan country as far as the Kopet Dagh Mountains, and to cross them to the Akhal Tekké country. I knew that such a journey would be fraught with the extremest peril, but I was resolved to risk everything rather than continue to spend my time as I had been, during the preceding five months. I only waited until one of my horses, which had become slightly sore-backed, could get quite cured, before I put my intention into execution. On the evening previous to the day which I had fixed for my departure old Dourdi took me confidentially aside, and disburdened himself of the secret which had been weighing on his mind since my last arrival at the village. He said that the military authorities at Tchikislar had repeatedly made enquiries of Turcomans who had visited the camp as to whether I still remained at Gumush Tepé, and that that same evening a message had been brought to the effect that if I did not at once withdraw from the *aoull* Cossacks would be sent to bring me a prisoner to Tchikislar. Though this information was subsequently again conveyed to me from another and a very reliable source, I had difficulty in attaching any value to it. Gumush Tepé will, doubtless, sooner or later pass once more into Russian hands, but it would have been a mere piece of foolish impertinence for the Tchikislar military authorities to have sent any message, such as that which I was told had been delivered, to the subject of another Power who was residing within the frontier of a third. The threat may have been employed with an idea of impressing the Turcomans with a belief in the great power of Russia, even beyond her own borders; but I am inclined to regard the whole thing as apocryphal, or at most as the outcome of idle vapouring on the part of some subordinate within the Muscovite camp.

On the morning of April 20, 1880, at earliest dawn, I

once more rode out into the plains that separated me from Asterabad. Forty miles are but little to those who have locomotives to carry them, but forty miles on a horse carrying at the same time all one's worldly goods, constitute a much more serious distance, especially when, owing to spring floods, a river of more than twenty feet in depth intervenes. Then there was another difficulty that people elsewhere would scarce think of. Owing to the frequent passage of Russian and Armenian agents over the plain in search of cattle and grain for the camp at Tchikislar, there were many young horsemen from adjacent villages who thought it worth their while to 'take to the road,' instead of looking after their more legitimate business. Even under ordinary circumstances an inhabitant of these parts would as soon think of going two miles without his sabre and gun as a Londoner of leaving his house without an umbrella; and then, not only would a man not start on a journey, however short, unarmed, but he would not go unaccompanied by at least a couple of others.

It is odd enough that this terrorism is not wrought by Tekké or Goklan raiders, such as usually carry off the flocks and camels of the villagers, and sometimes themselves into the bargain, but by the inhabitants of the Atterek delta, who have earned for themselves a most unenviable reputation for thievery and brigandage. On the very day I left Gumush Tepé an unfortunate Armenian trader was killed by these people. His body was recovered and brought into Tchikislar. The delta villages have been the head-quarters of the man-stealers, the dealers in kidnapped Persians, and though the presence of the Russian war steamers at Ashuradé and on the Caspian generally has put a stop to their former business, the spirit of evil is still strongly rife among them. That their own countrymen, who themselves do not bear an immaculate character,

should be afraid of them, speaks volumes. I shudder when I think how often I have gone alone among them, and attribute my safety to the unconscious audacity of the proceeding. I had not quite made up my mind whether to proceed direct to Asterabad, or to push on for a couple of days in an easterly direction, to Hadjilar, the point to which the Persian camp had been moved for the purpose of collecting the annual tribute among the Goklan Turcomans of that district. Having some letters to post, and wishing to get them off as soon as possible, I decided on making for Asterabad as the first stage in my journey. It was fortunate I did so, for had I gone eastward I should either have been made a prisoner or killed. During the preceding four years the turbulent Goklan Turcomans had paid no taxes to the Persian Government, and, without being in a state of actual insurrection, simply declined to pay any. Mustapha Khan, the energetic Governor of Asterabad, resolved that the money should be forthcoming—partly, I dare say, owing to the fact that, *more Persico*, a tolerably fair per-centage of it would remain in his own hands. He marched with his troops to the spot, and encamped. An interview with the principal Turcoman chiefs was eminently unsatisfactory. The Turcomans withdrew their flocks to a distance, and passed their nights in galloping round the entrenched camp discharging their long muskets at the defenders. In the course of one evening they managed to carry off five horses. Three messengers from Asterabad were intercepted and killed. A state of blockade existed, and only the lucky chance of my having letters to post saved me from the risky adventure of trying to cross the lines. A compromise was afterwards effected, and the active hostility of the nomads ceased for the moment.

As I rode out of Gumush Tepé my way lay across a dead level plain, broken only by the long, flat mounds of the line

of ancient entrenchments known as Alexander's Wall, and the occasional sail of a Turcoman lugger making its way slowly up the turbid, swollen stream of the Giurgen. The plain is so flat, and the river banks are so sharp-cut and nearly vertical, that as it winds through the Steppe the sails of the river boats seem rising from the Sahara itself. A hundred yards away the ground appears covered with a carpet of emerald green, but beneath one's horse's feet, except on very close inspection, nothing but bare, muddy soil is visible. There is, however, a tender springing grass like a green down, which in places is almost grown enough to allow of sheep nibbling at it. A little later in the year this nascent verdure is scorched to death by the fierce sun, which was already hotter than was at all agreeable. As we drew near the bed of the little river running by Kara Suli Tepé, where I had previously seen the immense shoals of stranded fish, a putrescent odour met my nostrils. The stench was overpowering, and reminded me of that of the bodies of decomposing camels, which I have seen sweltering in the summer sun. A few days after I had first seen them the fish had probably become so decomposed as to be considered undesirable even by sea-gulls and vultures, and the bulk of them were still there, rotting in the mud, exhaling a pestilential miasma which it was marvellous did not create disease in its immediate neighbourhood. A little co-operation and industry, on the part of the Turcomans dwelling within a reasonable distance of the spot, would have served to convert this now putrefying mass into a plentiful store of wholesome food. The excess not consumed by themselves could be profitably disposed of to the more inland Turcomans and to the population of Asterabad and its vicinity.

I have already described the road from Gumush Tepé to Asterabad, and have nothing new to say concerning it. I floundered through the slimy black mud of the stream

which flows towards the mound of Kara Suli Tepé, and had an odd encounter on the opposite bank. Two Turcomans, one a moullah, or priest, and the other a fisherman, took me and my servant for robbers, and brought us to a halt with their levelled guns until we managed to explain who we were. I must frankly say that if I were taken for a robber, I took my adversary for the same; and if he had the smallest idea of what a near escape he had of being shot by me, he would feel very thankful. The only new feature of the road was the passage of the river Giurgen, now very much flooded. Until at the very brink of the stream one has no notion of its presence; and then a swollen angry tide of seething yellow waters comes suddenly into view, flowing between vertical banks of stiff brownish clay. It is not more than fifty yards wide, and its winding bed is as regular as that of a canal. For half a mile on either side, the rich loamy soil, covered by a sprinkling of bushes, was as thoroughly torn up by the snouts of wild boars as if a steam plough had been at work on it. The number of boars must be enormous. Where they conceal themselves in the daytime is to me a profound mystery, for far and near there is not enough cover to conceal a rat. The same may be said of the jackals. One may traverse the plains for hours without seeing any covers within which these animals could hide themselves during the day; yet no sooner has the gloaming arrived than they seem to spring up, as if by magic, from the ground; and their yelping wails may be heard not fifty yards distant from a village within ten miles of which I am certain not one could have been seen an hour previously.

I found half a dozen Turcomans, with a heterogeneous collection of sheep and cows, halted on the river brink, making preparations to cross. On the opposite side were the *kibitkas* of a village, the immediate surroundings of

Il Geldi Khan, the chief of the district, for he had again changed his position since I last saw it. The passage of the river was characteristic of nomad life. The stream was flowing rapidly—at the rate of six miles an hour, at least. Saddles and horsecloths were taken off, and the animal was conducted to the steep edge of the river, which flowed about eight feet below, and tumbled in. He turned a couple of times, breasting the current, and then in a very business-like manner struck out for the opposite shore. It was evident that all the animals were accustomed to this method of fording, for the cows and sheep exhibited not the least alarm on being brought to the river's edge. All went over in gallant style. The choice of the point for crossing showed an eminently practical spirit. It was selected where the river made an elbow towards us. As a consequence the shore on our side, owing to the current impinging against it, was vertical—sometimes almost overhanging. This didn't matter, because the animals were thrown into the water. On the opposite shore, on account of the bend of the river, the ground shelved, and gave an easy access for landing. One of my horses, a large grey Caucasian animal, seemed to understand the whole proceeding. He went into the river of his own accord, and swam across. The other, bred on the Khirgese steppes, had probably never seen so much water before in his life; and once in the current seemed sadly at a loss what to do. Half a dozen times he tried to clamber up the steep slope whence he had been thrown in, and finding this vain, went into the midst of the river. The current was so strong that I greatly feared he would be swept away; but when he at last espied his comrade on the opposite bank, he went across—swimming as quickly as a man could walk. For the saddles, baggage, and men there was a small *taïmul*. It was only large enough to carry the boatman and another

person. The craft was so frail, and rocked so to and fro in the current, that before embarking I took the precaution of doffing my long boots and sword-belt for fear of an accident in the middle of the passage. The horses and other animals seemed to take to the water with a certain amount of avidity, owing to this being the season for shedding their coats—the advent of summer. My Khirgese horse, who usually looked more like a bear than any other animal I know of, had the general appearance of a mangy goat, for his hair was falling off in patches.

I know nothing stranger than the profuse hospitality with which these Turcoman nomads will receive in their *kibitka* the traveller whom they would plunder with the greatest pleasure five hundred yards away. I had scarcely clambered up the steep bank when I was literally seized upon, brought to the Khan's house, and forced to swallow an amount of rice, boiled with olive oil from Khiva, which I believe remained in my stomach for forty-eight hours. When I succeeded in making these good people understand that after all one's stomach has limits, the enormous dish was taken away; and in a few minutes it was announced that my escort was waiting. I found ten horsemen drawn up before the door. They looked, as far as the men, and especially their hats, were concerned, like so many of the Scots Greys; only their horses were superior to those of that regiment. These men were supposed to see me safely to Asterabad. As a French writer says, 'It was an ingenious manner of avoiding meeting brigands on the road by taking them with you.' In fact, the only possible danger I could run in my twenty-five miles' ride to the town was the risk of meeting the good people who escorted me. Our way lay close to the ruins of Mehemet Giurgen Kala. Here and there amid the fresh green surface were dark patches where lay the bones of fifty or sixty sheep and lambs, the victims

of the storms. The scene forcibly recalled to my mind battle-fields I had seen elsewhere in Asia, when jackal and wolf had done their work. Till I reached the banks of the Kara-Su river the bones formed one extensive *memento mori* over the plain. Remarking these serious effects of winter storms, it has more than once struck me that it is odd these Turcomans seem to learn but little from experience. Year after year, during succeeding ages, the snow-fraught *tenkis* sweeps over the Steppes, bringing death in its train. Where ancient earthworks exist they are taken advantage of as shelter; but it never enters into the heads of the shepherds to construct anything similar. Their general action is quite in consonance with their wretched little conical heads, in which firmness and ferocity are the dominating organs.

A ride entirely devoid of any incident of interest brought me to the northern gate of Asterabad. I had a long talk with Mr. Churchill about my proposed ride into the Akhal Tekké country; I also learned that General Skobeleff was on his way, if he had not already arrived, to take command of the Trans-Caspian expedition. After mature deliberation I resolved to proceed to Teheran, and there solicit the friendly offices of Mr. Zinovieff, the Russian Minister at that capital, believing that he might be able to procure for me the permission to accompany the Russian columns which had been denied to my own direct application. I had met this gentleman at Krasnavodsk, at the house of General Lomakin, and from his great courtesy on that occasion I entertained hopes that he would interest himself in my behalf. Mr. Churchill was about to leave for Baku, *en route* for Palermo, to which Consulate he had just been appointed, and as he intended journeying *viâ* Resht, through which town lay my easiest and most expeditious route to Teheran, I resolved to accompany him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### ASTERABAD TO ENZELI.

Environs of Asterabad—Green corn fodder—Pruning corn crops—Earthquake shock—Plan of journey—My travelling companions—Jungle road—Dangolan—Sleeping sheds—Forest growth—Wild animals—Karaoul Hanés—A lonely grave—Gez—Stuck in a quagmire—Kenar Gez—Mercurius and Caveass Company—Landing accommodation—Ashuradé—Russian and Persian policy—Absurd building restrictions—M. Yussuf—White truffles—Cotton—*Loups* and box-wood—On board the 'Cesarewitch'—Fog off Tchikislar—Commissariat swindling—Meshed-i-Ser—Cavalry at sea—Shah's summer palace at Enzeli—Persian launches—Mr. Churchill's departure—The 'Cesarewitch' mail steamer—Astatki ship furnace.

AROUND Asterabad the country was deliciously green, and the woods were clothed in their vernal dress. I have seldom looked over a more beautiful and luxuriant prospect than that to be seen from the ramparts of the old Persian city at this season. At all times, indeed, the immediate environs of the town are very fertile and beautiful; the never-failing water supply and the generous heat of the climate would scarcely allow them to be otherwise. Still, with the exception of the woods, the surrounding verdure is, to a great extent at least, the result of human labour, the ground never appearing to produce grass unless it be regularly sown, as I discovered when I gave directions for my horses to be taken outside the walls of Asterabad in order that they might pick up whatever fresh spring grass they could find in the fosses of the ramparts and in shady jungle patches. My servant came back with the story that he had been all round the walls without being able to

find any grass whatever. At this I became very vexed, thinking that he was telling falsehoods to avoid the trouble of watching the horses while they grazed, and I determined to test the truth of his statements with my own eyes. In the early spring, when the horses are changing their winter coats, fresh green fodder is absolutely necessary in order to keep them from getting out of condition. I not only went round the walls, but far and near on every side. The road-sides, banks, and hollows looked fresh and green enough, but it was with dandelion, crowsfoot, and a thousand other herbs—in fact, anything but grass, of which I could not discover a single blade anywhere except in the enclosed meadows. The green corn, extending in vast fields for miles round, was at least two feet high, and I was much surprised to see men busily engaged with sickles in cutting it down in this state, and conveying it on the backs of camels and horses to the town. I was informed that it was used as fodder for horses, in the same way as was the grass in other countries and climes. Some people at this season send their horses down to the plains beyond the Kara-Su, leaving them during the spring in the care of the Turcomans, to get fat upon the luxuriant grass of the inter-fluvial plain. This, however, is a risky proceeding, owing to the thievish and predatory habits of the tribes; I, at least, should not care to entrust an animal of any value to them. As there are many such at Asterabad, the owners have recourse to green corn while still in the blade. I asked whether this premature cutting down of the stalk did not destroy its power of producing grain later, and learned that quite the contrary resulted, and that after this kind of pruning it grows up more vigorously. In this way the agriculturists manage to get considerable value out of their land. They have two crops of grain in the year, the fields also doing duty in the spring as luxuriant meadows.

*A propos* of this reaping of corn-stalks before they come into ear, Mr. Churchill told me that when on a visit to a convent at Spalatro, on the Dalmatian coast, he was shown by one of the monks some corn-plants which he was informed had produced six thousand grains for each one sown. This was the result of an agricultural experiment. The corn was sown in October, and, when well above ground, was kept cut down until spring. It was then allowed to grow up, with the result which I have stated. Whether the grains produced in this manner were equal in size and quality to those which would have resulted had the plant been allowed to pursue its natural growth, I was not able to ascertain.

Just before quitting Asterabad we had a slight earthquake shock. Such occurrences are very common in these regions. I was standing in the court-yard of the consulate, talking with one of Mr. Churchill's sons. The courtyard was planted with orange trees, and had a large water-tank in its centre. The sun was shining hotly, and not a breath disturbed the air. The heat was rather oppressive. All at once was heard a sound as of the rushing of a mighty blast. The branches of the orange trees waved, and concentric circles spread themselves over the surface of the water in the reservoir, indicating a vibration of the earth. At the same time we felt the ground creep, as it were, beneath our feet. This was on April 24. Two months previously, at Gumush Tepé, I had experienced a similar shock. I was sitting upon my carpet, within the *kibitka*; a heavy murmuring sound, which I took to be an approaching *tenkis*, reached my ears, and at the same time I felt the earth below my carpet vibrate. Several articles in the *kibitka* fell to the ground, and old Dourdi's wife, who was standing at the entrance, saved herself from falling by grasping the door-post. The vibration was not strong

enough to upset her, but she was greatly disconcerted by the phenomenon, of which the Turcomans seemed to have a superstitious dread. When these shocks occur, the neighbouring mountain of Ak-Batlaouk, the mud volcano north of Tchikislar, usually exhibits signs of increased activity.

It was decided that we should leave Asterabad, *en route* for Gez, on the following day but one, and I made my final preparations for departure. My plans were to leave my horses and principal effects at Asterabad, in charge of my servant, and under the superintendence of Mr. Churchill's *mirza*—who, pending the arrival of the new consul, would remain at the Consulate and act *ad interim* as British agent—and then proceed to Teheran, there to try once more to obtain permission to accompany the Russian column. If this permission should be granted, my shortest way back to Tchikislar would be through Asterabad. Should I fail, my mind was made up, be the danger what it might, to penetrate to the Akhal Tekké country, or, should the Russians have arrived there before me, to Merv itself. In this event it was my intention to take post-horses to Shahrood, a town on the postal road to Meshed, and about two hundred and fifty miles distant from Teheran. There I should be joined by my horses and servant, and go on by whichever route circumstances should render most expedient.

It was mid-day on April 26, 1880, as Mr. Churchill and family and myself, with our following, sallied from the western gate of Asterabad *en route* for Kenar Gez, the so-called port of Asterabad. Our cavalcade was a tolerably numerous one. There were Mr. and Mrs. Churchill, seated in *kedjavés*, or camel baskets, balanced on opposite sides of a stout mule, accompanied by the *mirza* and four servants of the household, two of whom carried the children seated

before them on horseback. Then came several mules laden with baggage, and the procession was wound up by Mr. Harry Churchill, the consul's eldest son, myself, and my new Turkish servant Mehemet, for I had been obliged to dispense with the amorous Kurd, who was of no manner of service to me. In this guise we marched out of Asterabad, and, following a tolerably perfect portion of Shah Abass' causeway, approached the border of the forest which stretched between us and the Caspian.

Considering that Gez is the port of Asterabad, and one of the only three seaports possessed by Persia on the Caspian littoral, the state of the road leading to it from the latter town is surprisingly bad, even for this country. The first mile lay through a pomegranate jungle, and over broken, stony ground, gashed and torn by torrents. There is, strictly speaking, no road, and the traveller has the choice of a hundred footpaths, among which he is continually losing his way. Now and then we followed the track of Shah Abass' causeway. This was once a much frequented highway, but for the last hundred years has been little used. It consisted of a roadway of about ten feet in width, paved with roughly hewn stones of from twelve to fifteen inches in diameter. These stones are now tossed about in the wildest confusion, and constitute most disagreeable obstacles in the paths of horses. At intervals the causeway disappears in the midst of dense growths of brushwood and jungle, and the traveller is forced to make a *détour* by one of the by-paths, with its slimy yellow mud and disagreeable thorn bushes on either side, which tear his clothes to tatters. After some hours' weary creeping over this kind of ground, now and then coming to a full stop to hold a consultation as to the best way of crossing some deep, water-worn gully, with precipitous, boulder-strewn sides, and crossed by foot passengers by means of a shaky

construction of narrow planks upon which we did not dare trust our horses, we arrived at the village of Dengolan. It is, as villages generally are in these parts, a collection of a few dozens of houses of unbaked brick, and with high-pitched roofs with reed thatching, in connection with each of which is a platform, lifted on four poles to a height of twenty feet or thereabouts, and covered with a pointed thatch roof. On these raised stages the inhabitants sleep during the sultry weather. The entire village, inhabited solely by Persians, is surrounded by a high mud wall, flanked by towers as a defence against the forays of the neighbouring Turcomans. We were received by the head man of the village, who placed his own house at our disposal, and as Mr. Churchill's delicate state of health did not allow of his making long journeys, especially under circumstances involving such a scarcity of travelling conveniences, we resolved to pass the night at Dengolan. At sunrise we were again in the saddle, as we wished to reach Gez in time for the mail steamer which it was expected would anchor there the same evening.

Westward of Dengolan the road approaches the slopes of the Elburz mountains, and passes through a magnificent forest reaching to within a short distance of the Caspian shore. The road through this forest is considerably better than that across the stony jungle on the side nearest Asterabad, though there are occasional formidable ravines to be scrambled through, and deep rapid torrents to be passed on rickety bridges consisting of two or three trunks covered by planks, often in a very rotten condition. The forest is composed of sycamore, plantain, walnut, and box-wood trees, the three former often of gigantic proportions, so close together, and with interspaces so filled up with thorn bushes and creepers, as to render it impossible to penetrate even a few yards from the roadway. Leopards,

lynxes, wolves, and wild boars abound, and tigers of considerable size have been killed in this forest. It terminates quite suddenly at the banks of the Kara-Su river, which separates it from the plains reaching away northward to the river Giurgen. At long intervals along the way are *Karaoul hanés*, or police stations, each occupied by half a dozen policemen, armed with rifles. These posts are necessary to guarantee the road against the depredations of the Turcomans of the neighbouring plains, who occasionally lay ambuscades in the forest for passing mule and camel trains. Not far from one of these posts I noticed alongside the road the railed-in grave of a merchant killed but a short time previously by the Turcomans. Within a couple of miles of the coast the village of Gez is met with; that is, the old one, for the maritime village is situated on the coast itself. It is a straggling place, composed of about a hundred mud houses, a few of which are shops kept by Armenians. Between this place and the sea the forest dwindles again into jungle, and the ground becomes marshy and difficult to traverse. When quite close to the shore, and just about entering the little maritime village, my horse suddenly sank up to his girths in a quagmire of black, slimy, stinking mud, the surface of which had the appearance of solid ground. Scrambling off the animal's back, I suddenly found myself almost equally deeply embedded in the mud. Had it not been for the timely arrival of four Russian sailors I should probably have remained with my horse in a very uncomfortable predicament for an indefinite length of time, for every attempt to extricate myself or the animal only involved both of us more hopelessly in the swamp. It was only by means of broad planks and a large door placed on the surface of the quagmire that we were finally relieved from our disagreeable plight. A laden camel or mule train becoming

involved in this swamp at night would in all probability be totally lost.

The maritime village of Gez is a very inconsiderable place indeed. There are about a dozen small wooden houses in all; and a little way off is a pretty extensive caravanserai built by the Persian Government. This is the only brick building in the place, the others being constructed, in the most flimsy manner, of slight planking. They are almost entirely occupied by Armenian shopkeepers, whose miserable little booths are exactly in the style of those seen in Persian bazaars. There are but two or three considerable merchants—all Armenians. There is also an office of the Mercurius and Cavcass Steamship Company, whose vessels touch at this place once a week—or are supposed to do so. A miserable wooden jetty, about a hundred yards long, running out from the shore, constitutes the sole landing accommodation. This landing stage is but five feet wide, supported on poles four inches in diameter, and constructed of weak planks, many so loosely fastened as to render walking over them dangerous. Such is the place which goes by the high-sounding appellation of the 'port of Asterabad,' an odd name enough, as it is twenty-five miles from the town in question. I have no doubt but that, in the future, Gez is destined to become a place of considerable importance, when, as it inevitably will, it changes owners, and passes into Russian hands, along with, perhaps, the town of Asterabad itself. The possibility and probability of this change are prominently before the eyes of the Persian Government, and have done much to hinder the natural development of the place. About fifteen miles away to the north-westward is the Russian naval station of Ashuradé, faintly visible from the mainland. It was formerly connected with the sand spit which encloses the outer margin of the bay of the same name; and a considerable number of

houses, the quarters provided for the small garrison, stood upon it. It was rather summarily occupied by the Russians, and a station was formed, to which resorted the flotilla of the Caspian charged with the suppression of the Turcoman slave trade. The little space thus utilised has been much diminished during past years by the action of waves and currents, and in a short time will become entirely untenable, many houses having been lately abandoned owing to the encroachments of the sea. Another naval station will ere long be necessary, and Gez stands temptingly in the way. As its occupation would, like that of Ashuradé, be set forth as being purely in the interest of Persia, and with a view of protecting her subjects along the South Caspian coast against the incursions of Turcoman pirates and man-stealers, the Shah's Government could hardly with a good grace offer any strenuous opposition to its acquisition by Russia, especially if offers were made for its purchase. Still, the idea of any further advance of Russia in that direction is regarded by the Persian Government with extreme disfavour, and everything that can be done in the way of discouraging the idea of the transference of the naval station to Gez is carefully and sedulously carried out.

As I have already mentioned, the population of the place is almost entirely Armenian, and among them are a few enterprising merchants who, if allowed, would speedily, for the sake of their cotton, silk, and boxwood traffic, do much to develop the place and improve it as a commercial emporium. To effect this improvement would, however, render the town the more tempting to Russian acquisitiveness, and strict orders have been issued by the Persian authorities, the result of which is an effectual check to all advance and improvement. Not only is the road to Asterabad left in the state which I have described, and which, one would naturally suppose, it would be to the advantage of

the Government, in the interests of the commerce of the country, to improve, but the inhabitants of Gez have been formally forbidden to erect stone or brick buildings of any description, on the rather far-fetched plea that such constructions might be made capable of defence, and employed in resistance of the Government. This argument, however, could not be urged against the erection of a proper stone jetty, an undertaking which M. Yussuf, a rich Armenian merchant of the place, and at whose house Mr. Churchill and myself were hospitably entertained, offered to carry out at his own expense, with the idea of facilitating the shipment of his merchandise. His offer was refused, and a veto was put upon any effort to better the present ridiculously inadequate accommodation. As a consequence, notwithstanding the very brisk traffic of Gez, it remains the same wretched little collection of wooden shanties that it has been for many years. One would have imagined that the reverse of this policy on the part of the Persian Government would have been adopted, and that by developing the port to its utmost capabilities, increasing the population, and improving its communications with the interior of the country, they would have sought indisputably to demonstrate its connection with the rest of the kingdom. Keeping the country a desert, and limiting Gez to its present insignificant condition, as well as isolating it as much as possible from Asterabad, would seem to most people eminently adapted to excuse even a summary occupation by Russia for a superficially plausible object. Following the same line of policy, the Persian Government refused for many years to permit the construction of a road from the port of Resht (Enzeli) in the direction of the capital, lest in the event of hostilities the march of Russian troops to Teheran might be facilitated.

At M. Yussuf's house, where Mr. Churchill and family

were most courteously received and hospitably entertained, we had an opportunity of tasting the white truffles for which the south-eastern Caspian coast is celebrated. These delicacies, which elsewhere are served out but occasionally and with a very sparing hand, were, at M. Yussuf's table, laid before us in large dishes well filled. For my own part, though I am very fond of truffles, I took but sparingly of them on this occasion, as I could not stomach the high flavouring of onion and garlic which an Armenian cook thought fit to add.

The cotton trade of Gez is very brisk. The rickety pier groaned beneath the weight of bales which were being constantly shipped on board luggers and schooners for transport to Baku and Astrakan; and each of the Caspian steamers calling at the place is always sure of a cargo of this material alone. It is brought from different parts of the interior; especially from Meshed and the country lying to its south and east, camels and occasionally mules being used for its carriage. Another considerable article of commerce at Gez consists of *loups*, the large wart-like excrescences which occur on the trunk of the walnut, and which are exported to Europe, principally to Vienna and Paris, for the purpose of being sawn up into veneer sheets wherewith to impart the beautifully corrugated walnut grain to articles of furniture made of cheaper material. These *loups*, when of good quality and of large size (three to four feet in diameter) fetch fabulous prices; often selling for upwards of forty or fifty pounds sterling. A very large trade in boxwood, too, is carried on, immense quantities being cut on the mountain slopes, and exported to every part of the world.

It was only on the second day after my arrival at Gez that I was able to go on board the mail steamer, which was as usual behind time, with a view of proceeding to Resht,

*en route* for Teheran. Though the passengers were all on board before sunset on the evening of April 30, it was only at nine o'clock next morning that we started, the delay being caused by the shipment of a large quantity of Mazanderan cotton. We had on board a number of Russian officers belonging to the paymaster's department, and bound for Tchikislar in charge of a sum of one million of roubles, intended principally for the purchase of camels for the transport service. From Gez to Tchikislar is about five hours' fast steaming. A little before midday a dense mist shut out all sight of land, and at two o'clock, deeming from calculation and soundings that we were off our destination, we cast anchor. All day long the fog continued too dense to allow of our seeing the shore, and it was only after midnight that the lights of Tchikislar became visible, when we ran in for about five miles to the usual anchoring ground. As these fogs happened very frequently, and communication with the camp was a matter of daily recurrence, it seemed incredible that the mail steamers should be unprovided with guns or other means of signalling their presence. Had we possessed any such appliances, a boat or launch might easily have been summoned to pilot us, and thereby obviate the wasting of twenty hours. The Russian officers went on shore at daybreak, but, owing to the delay occasioned by landing stores and taking in passengers and goods, it was half-past eleven in the morning before we weighed anchor.

As seen from the steamer, the camp presented its usual appearance, little change being noticeable save that a considerable number of permanent wooden buildings had been erected. Vast heaps of corn sacks were to be seen ranged in line behind the camp, and near them was stacked an enormous quantity of hay. A whole fleet of Turcoman luggers were discharging their cargoes of this commodity,

and large numbers were coming from the direction of Gumush Tepé, charged to the water's edge with the same material. While we were taking in passengers and cargo from the camp I noticed that, notwithstanding the orders of the Shah, and the measures adopted for preventing food supplies from leaving Persia for the Russian camp, these supplies still continued, and that, too, to such an extent as to create a redundancy of stores at Tchikislar. Some Armenian dealers brought off in luggers to the steamer over one hundred and fifty sheep, and some two hundred sacks of corn, all destined for Baku, where, I was informed, both sheep and corn could be disposed of at a very large profit; and probably for reshipment to Tchikislar once more.

This will give a fair idea of the manner in which things were managed in the camp, when dealers were permitted to procure and send off stores which the authorities were straining every nerve to accumulate there. At length we started towards Gez, where there was still more cargo to be taken in, and it was half-past seven in the evening ere we stood across the bay to Ashuradé, for the purpose of shipping the mails. At that hour it was too late to continue the voyage, and we were obliged to anchor off the naval station till next morning, the extreme shallowness of the water, and the tortuous nature of the navigable channel, rendering it impossible to get out in the dark. At four o'clock next morning we started, halting again at Meshed-i-Ser, a small maritime village, eight hours' steaming from Ashuradé, on the south Caspian shore, where a consignment of cotton bales detained us until four in the afternoon. From this village to Enzeli is a run of seventeen hours. With the morning light came another dense fog, and when we were supposed to be in the neighbourhood of Enzeli we were forced to lie to, as at Tchikislar, waiting for the mist to

clear off. This only took place towards half-past two in the afternoon, when we found that we were in our proper anchoring ground, little more than a mile off shore. Had the fog lasted, as it often does, a couple of days, we should have been obliged to lie helplessly where we were, or to go on to Baku, and return by the next steamer. As it was, the delay in arriving at Enzeli from Gez was perfectly preposterous, especially for a mail steamer, and the swiftest vessel on the Caspian. From Gez to Enzeli is only a run of twenty-four hours, while we took over three days and a half! Notwithstanding a long experience of the Caspian, and ample means of every kind, not the smallest measure has been adopted to obviate the delays caused by fogs; and in one instance I have known the horses of a cavalry regiment, on board a transport thus detained off Tchikislar, reduced almost to starvation for want of forage, it being ultimately found necessary to feed them with biscuit brought for the troops. The Russian authorities were laying up ample provision stores at Tchikislar before allowing the expedition to march, for, between fogs and sudden storms, it is quite possible for the communications with the camp to be interrupted for many days, and the landing of provisions rendered impossible.

When the mist cleared away, the low-lying coast was distinctly visible to right and left. Prominent among the other objects was a queer-looking octagonal tower, with pointed roof, standing close to the water's edge, and which, I was informed, was an occasional summer residence of the Shah. Our steamer was surrounded by a multitude of strange high-pooped launches of unpainted wood, manned by a most piratical-looking, noisy set of men, and rowed with extremely lengthy oars of singular form. Each oar consisted of a pole some nine feet long, having attached to its extremity a flat piece of wood in the shape

of the ace of spades, giving the entire instrument the appearance of a great wooden shovel.

The steamer (the 'Cesarewitch') started in half an hour for Lenkoran and Baku, with Mr. Churchill on board. I take this opportunity of acknowledging the unvarying kindness and hospitality which on many occasions I received at his hands and those of his amiable family, and to thank him for the invaluable assistance he has ever given me in forwarding my letters and telegrams to Europe from localities in which without his assistance I should have found it difficult indeed to maintain my communications with that continent.

The 'Cesarewitch' is an English-built steamer, and the swiftest on the Caspian, being only surpassed in speed by the 'Nasr Eddin Shah' war steamer. To convey it from the Baltic to the Caspian it was necessary that it should traverse the whole of the Neva Ship Canal, and afterwards descend the Volga to Astrakan. On the Neva Canal are fifty-four locks, and the 'Cesarewitch's' length was too great to allow of her entering them. Her present chief engineer, Mr. Vine, an Englishman, cut her into two pieces amidships, and, filling up the open extremities with iron bulkheads, floated her through the canal. At Astrakan the same gentleman put her together again, and has remained ever since in charge of her machinery. Her boilers are heated by petroleum refuse instead of coal, a system which effects an enormous saving of expense and labour, the heating apparatus being as thoroughly under control as a gas jet, and requiring but one man to manipulate it. It consists of two tubes, each about an inch in diameter, terminating at the same point in a small oblong brass box. Through one of these tubes the black residual naphtha (*astatki*) drops slowly, being blown into spray by a jet of steam from the boiler, conveyed through the second tube.

This spray, when ignited, forms a great sheet of flame, which is projected into the hollow of the boiler. It has the immense advantage of requiring no stoking, as no ashes are produced; and by turning down the flame to the desired degree, the steam can always be kept up to the pressure required for immediate starting without the tedious and more or less wasteful process of 'banking' the fires. An arrangement like this is invaluable for cruisers lying off an enemy's port, and requiring to hold their steam in readiness. It is intended to apply the same system of heating to the locomotives on the Tiflis-Baku railway, when that line is completed; and it will doubtless play an important part in the steam communications destined at no distant period to traverse the steppes to Khiva and Samarcand.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ENZELI TO RESHT.

Landing at Enzeli—The Shah's yacht—A naval salute—Persian flag on the Caspian—Armenian traders—Articles of export—Dried fish—Shah's lodge—Across the Moredab—A tattered sail—Piri-Bazaar river—Fishing weir—Road to Resht—Former dread of Russians—*Tilimbars*—*Pebrine* and *flacherie* diseases—Tobacco *versus* silk—Resht—Novel mode of torture—Retribution.

THE passenger going ashore at Enzeli ceases for the moment to have any will of his own. The steamer is surrounded by great Persian launches, ten at least to every one person desiring to land. Some of the crew of each launch board the mail packet. What follows after your statement of intention to go to Enzeli is an illustration of the law of natural selection. A 'free fight' ensues, during which the strongest succeed in getting nearest to your person and effects. The Prophet Ali and the twelve holy Imams are called upon in fervent tones to bear witness to the iniquity of the man who has laid hold of your saddle-bags, by the others who have been unsuccessful in trying to do the same. Yells and threats are interchanged, and the traveller is ultimately hustled along the deck and over the side into one of the high-prowed launches, to reach which he has had perhaps to skip over a dozen others, springing from gunwale to gunwale as they toss and heave and bump together in the long Caspian swell. Amidst cries and execrations we force our way through the press of boats, and then the crew, raising a loud shout of 'Allah, Mahomet

ya Ali!' bend to their odd-looking oars, and we sweep away to the southward, skirting the low-lying wooded shore. Entering the mouth of the Moredab, an extensive backwater into which fall the Piri Bazaar river and other streams, we come alongside the fairly constructed quay, where some scores of coasting vessels and two small trading steamers are lying in company with the only public vessel owned by Persia on the Caspian waters, the Shah's yacht. This, which is about the size of an ordinary Thames steamer, is painted of a dirty whity-yellow colour, with some ill-painted tawdry decorations about the stern, and crude gilding at the bow. The ensign staff aft is badly painted with helical stripes, so as exactly to resemble a barber's pole. The fittings of the little deck saloon are poor, and in the last state of dilapidation. Never have I seen so shabby a royal yacht. I have been told that its commander holds the rank of admiral. According to the terms of a treaty between Persia and Russia, the first-named Power is not allowed to hoist her flag on the Caspian waters. On one occasion, the Persian Admiral found it necessary to go with his flag-ship to Baku to have some repairs of the machinery effected. Forgetful of the provisions of the treaty, or perhaps thinking that an exception must necessarily be made in the case of the Shah's yacht, he had the 'Lion and Sun' standard floating at the peak as he came in sight of Baku. A cannon was discharged from a Russian battery —a blank charge of course. 'Ha,' said the Admiral to himself, 'I see they know who is on board, and pay the proper tribute of respect.' Under this agreeable delusion he held on his way towards the harbour. Bang, came another blank shot. Further self-gratulation on the part of the Admiral. After a couple of minutes a fresh smoke cloud burst from the embrasures; but this time, a round shot whistled across the yacht's fore-foot. There was no

mistaking the nature of the cannon shots after that. They were fired in warning; and so, at the third and shotted discharge, the Persian flag was hurriedly lowered. This regulation, which forbids the hoisting of the 'Lion and Sun' standard on the Caspian, is very humiliating to Persia, and unfair to the last degree, for she possesses three ports along its southern shores—Gez, Meshed-i-Ser, and Enzeli.

Enzeli is but a very inconsiderable place, owing whatever importance it possesses to being a station where the productions of Mazanderan are shipped for other Caspian ports. The traders are principally Armenians, who reside together in a large square termed the *Irmeni Caravanserai*. Here, at all hours of the day, hemp, silk, cotton, tobacco, and grebe skins are to be seen. The traffic in this latter article is very considerable, large quantities being exported annually to Europe for the manufacture of ladies' muffs, head-dresses, and other female attire. They are bought at Enzeli for a franc apiece, and bring, I am told, from three to four in the European markets.

Not far from the mouth of the Moredab, on its eastern shore, is an extensive fishing establishment, the property of a rich Armenian merchant. Scores of fishing boats were at anchor discharging their cargoes of *sefid mahee* (the Caspian carp) at the landing-stage. Eleven hundred men were engaged in fishing, cleaning the fish, and opening, salting, and drying them. The products of this fishery are exported in immense quantities to Russia, and also despatched to the interior of Persia, where they form an important part of the dietary of the poorer classes. A little farther to the north of this fishing station is a dismantled battery, the guns which formerly armed it now lying on the ground a little way to the rear.

The Shah's palace, situated on the western shore of the entrance to the Moredab, is a singular-looking edifice. It

consists of an octagonal tower, apparently over sixty feet in height, about thirty in diameter, and crowned by a flattened conical roof of red tiles. Inclusive of the ground floor there are five stories, each surrounded by an exterior verandah-covered balcony. The upper story, which is the loftiest and most elaborately decorated of all, is that used by the Shah, and commands an extensive view over the neighbourhood. I am told that he considers this view equal, if not of superior beauty, to any which he has seen in Europe, notwithstanding the fact that it consists solely of an unbroken prospect of fen and marsh, and the uninteresting shore and leaden grey of the Caspian waters. The balcony and verandah of the royal chamber are decorated with white plaster pillars and arches, gaudily painted, and set with glittering surfaces of looking-glass. The next story under it, intended for the accommodation of the Shah's immediate suite, is also gaudily decorated, but with less of the looking-glass, the use of this latter being apparently a royal prerogative. Each succeeding lower story is less and less brilliantly painted, the ground-floor being very shabby indeed. Its verandah has rude wooden pillars coarsely daubed with red paint, and the walls are painted with exceedingly primitive attempts at representing modern Persian soldiers. The palace stands in a garden of about an acre in extent. It is simply a grass-grown expanse planted with orange trees, and here and there a rose-bush running wild. To protect the decoration against the deleterious effects of the moist winds blowing over the Caspian, the building is almost entirely wrapped up in bass matting, portions of its southern side only being visible. A short way off are the remains of an extensive convent of dervishes, now in ruins. It is of red brick, and the massive tower which served as a minaret is now utilised as a lighthouse.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when, in company

with two others, an English engineer and an Armenian of the same profession, both proceeding to Teheran, Mr. Harry Churchill, the *gholam*, and myself, went on board a large launch which was to convey us across the Moredab, and up the Piri-Bazaar river. For some time we rowed between the extremities of wooded land spits jutting out into the channel leading to the open water. Then we rowed out into the wide expanse of the Moredab itself. The name signifies 'dead water,' and a drearier expanse of slumbering surface it would be hard to meet with. Its shores are thickly grown with giant reeds which reach far out into the shallow waters. Islands, reed-grown too, are met with, the ground raised but a few inches above the surrounding surface. It is only at this point and at a few places between it and Gez that Moore's epithet of 'the Caspian's reedy banks' at all holds good; for the northern, western, and eastern shores are remarkably bare. The Moredab at the point where we crossed it must be nigh twelve miles wide. Its length from east to west is considerably greater. It is very shallow, and, even at the deepest portions, it was possible to reach bottom with one of the queer long shovel-shaped oars with which our launch was propelled. Some way out from shore a light breeze sprang up; a mast was stepped, and a sail of surprisingly large proportions hoisted. It seemed, in view of its tattered condition, to have been through a severe naval engagement. There was scarce a square foot of it which was not perforated with holes, some of them as large as if made by a twenty-four pounder shot. It seemed wonderful how it held together, much more how it stood the pressure of the breeze.

Approaching the southern shores of the lagoon, the reed brakes became more extensive, and the reedy islands larger and more numerous, in fact, separated from each other

only by narrow winding canals or breadths of half-inundated marshy ground forming the delta of the Piri-Bazaar river, which we were now entering. Far away to the westward, immense flocks of water-fowl covered the waters or hung above them, wheeling and shifting like a storm-driven cloud. Our boat glided on amid the reedy solitudes, where the silence was broken only by the plashing of the oars, the shrill cry of some startled sea bird, or the scream of the fish-hawk. Then we entered the narrow channel of the river, varying in breadth from fifteen to twenty paces, the banks thickly covered with jungle and forest growth. The surface of the water was thickly strewn with the inflated swimming bladders of fish, coming from the curing establishment higher up the river. Large numbers of water snakes, too, were to be seen gliding by our boat. Great black 'snaggs' stuck out from the water like marine monsters watching for their prey, and water-logged tree trunks clung among the roots projecting into the sluggish stream. Once we were well within the regular river channel, the crew, with the exception of one who remained to steer, got out on the right bank, where a narrow pathway ran close to the edge of the water, just inside the tall bushes fringing it. A towing rope was fastened to the top of the mast, and the boat was thus drawn along, the five men in Indian file proceeding at a run. The rope was made fast to the top of the mast, so as to carry it clear of the bushes. Occasionally we met other boats similarly dragged along and proceeding in an opposite direction to ours, the towers following the same path. The towing-rope of the boat next the bank was slackened, and that of the one passing outside was jerked over the top of the mast of the first with a movement like that of a child's skipping-rope.

It was six in the afternoon when we reached Piri-Bazaar (the old man's bazaar), the farthest point southward to which

boats can go, as there is a fishing weir drawn across the stream at this point. Piri-Bazaar consists of a caravanserai, a few dozen houses, and the fishing station. All goods *in transitu* from the Caspian to Teheran pass through this place. The little animation it possesses is due to this traffic.

If I can trust the accuracy of the information I received, the capture of fish at the weir is enormous, fifty thousand of one kind or another being the amount taken daily. The principal fish captured at the weir are the *sefid mahee* (carp); the *soof*, the *somme* (four feet long); the salmon and salmon trout, besides the sturgeon, are caught in the brackish water lower down. The flesh of the sturgeon is but little used save by the poorer classes—the sterlet, a smaller species, being the only kind usually served at table, and generally used only for making soup. The sturgeon taken here measures from seven to nine feet long, the isinglass and *caviare* being the only portions utilised. This *caviare*, so largely consumed in Russia, is called by the Greeks *argotarako*, and by the Italians *boutargne*.

At Piri-Bazaar there are always riding horses and carts for the conveyance of travellers and their luggage to Resht, which can be reached in an hour by trotting pretty briskly. The road, which is only of recent construction, is very fair for Persia. For a long time it had been forbidden to construct any, lest it might facilitate a Russian advance on the capital. During the last Russo-Persian war, a Russian expedition tried to penetrate from Enzeli to Resht, but owing to the impassable nature of the intervening forest, then traversed only by a narrow swampy track, after the most herculean efforts to cut its road through, and having been decimated by fever, it was obliged to retire.

Clearings have been made in the woods, and a good deal of cultivation at present exists. At fre uent intervals

odd-looking structures with high-pitched roofs, the eaves projecting and supported by wooden props, appear. The thatching is of reeds and brambles of a brown colour, the whole resembling a very pointed haystack supported on low pillars. These were the *tilimbars* or sheds for rearing silkworms. Silk has been for a long time one of the staple products of this province (Ghilan); but, unfortunately, the prevalence of the *pebrine* and *flacheric* diseases, which during the previous five or six years wrought sad havoc among the worms, reduced the production of silk to such a degree that the cultivators were ruined. In consequence of this blight, a memorial was forwarded to the Shah praying for a remission of taxes. This remission, I understand, was granted; but the local authorities kept on the screw for their own private benefit. Since this decline in silk production many of the *tilimbars* have been idle; tobacco seed from Samsoun on the southern Black Sea coast was sown, and the flourishing crops which resulted have done much to restore prosperity to the district.

Resht itself is a scattered kind of place, largely composed of two-story houses built of unbaked brick, and roofed with red tiles. The minarets of the two mosques are of quite an unusual style. They are stout towers of red brick tapering slightly, and crowned with flattened cones of tiles, the cones projecting so much as to give the structure the appearance of an overgrown mushroom.

The climate of Resht is exceedingly unwholesome in summer, owing to the low-lying nature of the surrounding ground and its swampy character. The neighbouring woods are full of game, especially pheasants and partridges, and wolves, jackals, lynxes, and hyænas are to be found in the immediate vicinity. I have been informed that tigers of considerable size have from time to time been killed at no great distance from the town. Owing to the combined heat

and moisture the vegetation around the place is redundant, flowers blooming all the year round.

What little commercial activity there is at Resht is due to the business carried on by Armenian and Greek merchants, and the firm of Ziegler and Co. At one of the Armenian caravanserais I saw very large quantities of raw silk being put up in bales for exportation to Marseilles, over one hundred large bales at least. When, during the great depression in this particular trade, owing to the malady prevailing among the worms, the quantity thus sent off at one shipment by a single house was so very considerable, I could well imagine what the aggregate amount in favourable years must have been.

During the three days I remained at Resht I heard sad tales of misgovernment and extortion on the part of the local authorities. There seemed to be no regular system of taxation, the governor paying a certain amount to the Shah annually, and having delegated to him apparently unlimited power to squeeze as much as possible from the native merchants and peasantry. I was informed on unquestionable authority that a very short time previous to my arrival a trader had been imprisoned and buried up to his neck in the floor of his dungeon. Ice was kept constantly applied to his head to torture him, with a view of forcing from him a large sum of money. He stood this cruel punishment so long without yielding, that the stock of ice in the town was quite expended, and the governor was forced to adopt a new system of torture through sheer incapacity to continue the old one. The evildoer himself was, however, not entirely exempt from the ills of life, for he had married a princess of the Shah's family, and whenever he displeased his spouse, the lady, by virtue of her royal descent, had him soundly bastinadoed by his own servants.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### RESHT TO TEHERAN.

Posting in Persia—Sefid-Rood—Mountain roads—Rustamabad—Olive groves—Rood Bar—Mengil—Travelling in the dark—Stormy glen—Marc Antony and the snakes—Shah Rood—Corpse caravan—Starved post-horses—Pood Chenar—A deserted post-house—Kurd encampment—Pass of Kharzon—Kurds on the march—Funeral rites—Imam Zadé—Masrah—The *garrib-gez*—Miana—A Persian remedy—An appeal to the Shah—Fortified villages—Kanots—Kasvin—Persian tombstones—Hotel—Enamelled tiles—A good postmaster—A contrast—A breakdown—Good ponies—Mounds and villages—Count de Monteforte—Approaching Teheran—Gates and fortifications.

As yet post-horses are the only means of rapid travelling in Persia. When a postal service of the kind is well conducted one can get along pretty well, but when, as in that country, the utmost mismanagement prevails, travelling post is the most exquisite torture it is possible to conceive. It was close on mid-day before I was able to get away from Resht, mounted on a very fair horse. I was accompanied by Mr. Harry Churchill, son of the Asterabad consul. We had with us a *gholam*, or courier, belonging to the British Legation at Teheran, and the usual postman to take back the horses. For the first ten miles the road was level and good, skirted on either side by wooded hills of inconsiderable elevation, separated from us by level tracts of well-cultivated ground and stretches of luxuriant woodland. Streams of water continually crossed the road, as the irrigation canals were led from one field to another. With such a constant water supply from the Elburz chain, and such unfailing

sunshine, the province of Ghilan should be one of the richest in the world. For the first two hours one might imagine himself riding through some rural lane in Western Europe. Then the road began to ascend a somewhat steep hill, parts of which were rugged in the extreme, and we found ourselves proceeding along the brink of an awkward earth cliff overhanging the magnificent Sefid-Rood river.

At this point the stream is nearly a mile wide—a vast expanse of surging yellow waters, broken by islets and sand banks, and bearing along tree trunks and accumulations of bushes torn from its banks. To the eastward, tall scarped mountains descend to the water's edge. As soon as the road begins to ascend it becomes simply execrable. Long stretches of pavement occur, which, owing to the springs which trickle across them, are reduced to accumulations of loose stones and deep muddy gashes, over which a horse can make his way but slowly. For twenty miles we were in constant fear that our horses would fall upon the step-like strata, which at some points resemble more a steep flight of stairs than what we are accustomed to consider a post road. It was well that our horses were pretty strong and well fed, or we should never have got over some of the very bad places. As it was, the animals were only able to make ten steps at a time, halting for half a minute before they could climb as much more. More than once I dismounted and toiled up the ascent on foot, for it seemed little short of barbarity to ride a horse up such an incline. What the engineers of the road were thinking of when they planned it, I cannot imagine. It ascends and descends in the most capricious manner, when with less labour it might just as well have been constructed at a regular level along the hill slopes over which it has been cut—principally by blasting, as the drill holes in the rocks indicate. At one

very difficult spot we passed three European carriages, each being dragged by a dozen men, and which, to judge by the rate of progress they were making, would probably take at least a month to get to Teheran.

After a weary journey of twenty-four miles we reached the first station at a place called Koudoum, where we changed horses, receiving animals which looked just as tired and worn as those we had given up. With these we scrambled along for another twenty miles to Rustamabad, a dreary-looking mud caravanserai, the only habitation within sight for miles around. The mountains, which had hitherto been densely wooded and verdant, now became bare and arid, the bright red and orange tinting of the cliffs and slopes indicating the presence of iron. From Rustamabad the road was, if possible, worse and more precipitous than before; and the rapid closing in of night did not tend to smooth our difficulties. It was pitch dark as we ascended and descended horrid inclines along the edge of yawning abysses, which, perhaps luckily, we could but indistinctly discern, and to which, from far below, came the dull plashing roar of the Sefid Rood. Then the road became a little more practicable, and we descended into a valley thickly overgrown with very large olive trees—in some places forming dense thickets. Here and there glimmering lights were visible, and we could just distinguish the outline of some low mud houses. We had arrived at the commencement of a long straggling village, Rood Bar by name, which stretches along the banks of the Sefid Rood river for a distance of at least three miles. It was half-past nine at night before we reached the further end, where some dozen buildings, gathered into a kind of street, constituted the bazaar. Lights were still burning in a few of the houses, and we at length found lodgings in a small shop kept by an Armenian. The rough boarded floor was

our bed, our saddles were our pillows, our overcoats the only covering available; but after sixty-four miles of hard riding one is easily contented with any place of rest. The regular postal station was two or three hours further on, but under the circumstances it was impossible to go any further that night. We started at three o'clock the following morning. The road was again very bad, especially that portion of it which we were obliged to traverse before the light of dawn appeared. No pains whatever seemed to have been taken to improve the rough track worn among broken, shelving strata by the camel and horse traffic of past ages. Travelling over such a road in the dark is most trying to the nerves. The horses, endeavouring to scramble up or down the steep ascents, many of them having an incline of forty-five degrees, slipped and stumbled at every step. The faintly-seen rocks seemed swimming around in the gloom. The horseman suddenly finds himself girth-deep in a torrent of whose existence he only becomes aware by the flash and roar of the waters. Huge spectral cliff-faces loomed in the faint dawn-light, and the white expanse of the surging river gleamed out, far down the precipice on the verge of which the road wound. No barrier of any kind existed to prevent man or beast from going over the edge. Someone has remarked that the roads of a country are the truest indices of its civilisation. If this be true, Persia must be backward indeed.

Just as the sun was rising we arrived at a long stone bridge spanning the Sefid Rood, and had an opportunity of witnessing a curious phenomenon peculiar to the place. At the moment the sun shows above the horizon a violent wind commences to blow, continuing without interruption till evening. This wind blows at all seasons, and is sometimes so violent as to render crossing the bridge dangerous, especially for laden camels, the great surface exposed to

the action of the wind sometimes causing the animals to be blown over the parapet into the torrent. This portion of the valley bears the name of Mengil, and is remarkable for the great number of venomous serpents by which it is infested. When the Roman army, led by Marc Antony, came here, the camp had to be moved from the valley on account of the great quantity of vipers.[1] I recollect an occurrence similar to this during the late campaign in Armenia, when a Russian detachment, camped among the ruins of the ancient town of Ani, were obliged to strike their tents and move some distance off because of the large numbers of serpents. A short distance above the bridge of Mengil the Shah Rood falls into the Sefid Rood, which latter stream, above the point of junction, is called by a different name. A short distance outside the town, or rather village, of Mengil, I came up with a small caravan going in the direction of Teheran. For some time I had been noticing a most unpleasant odour, which I was at a loss to account for. So strong was it that I supposed that a number of camels or horses must be lying rotting in my vicinity; and I urged my horse rapidly forward to get clear of the stench. However, the further I pushed on, the stronger became the smell, and I was quite at my wits' end to account for its persistency, when a glance at one of the caravan conductors gave me an inkling as to whence it proceeded. The man was trudging along behind a small grey ass. He looked deadly pale, and his mouth and the entire lower part of his face were wrapped in a large cloth. On the ass's back was an oblong white case, which I at once recognised as a coffin; especially when, on nearing it, the stench became overpowering. It was a caravan carrying dead bodies to be interred at Kerbella in holy ground. The

[1] I give this on the authority of H.M. the Shah, who makes the statement in his published diary of a voyage to Europe.

driver of the ass had swathed his mouth and nose with cloths to avoid the pestilential effluvia emanating from the putrid corpse which his ass was carrying. He had been several days on the march, and I am not surprised that he looked sick and pale, considering the atmosphere which he breathed. I understand that Government orders have been issued prohibiting this system of corpse caravans; but though the traffic is much diminished, it still exists to a certain extent. I galloped briskly on to get out of the unwholesome neighbourhood, and soon reached the station of Mengil. Here a considerable delay occurred in procuring post horses, and, when they were forthcoming, they were of the most miserable description, apart from which they looked as if they had been starved for a week.

Pushing forward as rapidly as possible, we followed the right bank of the Shah Rood, the road sometimes descending into the swampy river marge. After seven hours' riding we reached the station of Pood Chenar (the foot of the plane-tree), where we saw a choice specimen of the manner in which things are managed on this postal line. Pood Chenar consists of two buildings, one a kind of caravanserai, built of mud and unbaked bricks; the other, a posting station built in the same manner. The country across which we travelled was mountainous and barren. Bleak, bare rounded hills girded our path, all striped orange and green with metallic deposits. Not a human being was to be seen, and the two buildings, so far as their loneliness was concerned, might have been a pair of enchanted castles. We toiled up a steep ascent, and arrived before a high arched doorway, the double doors of which lay wide open. No groom or ostler came to meet us. We called and shouted; we entered, and searched every nook and cranny of the building. Neither horses nor men were to be found. Our horses, after seven hours' rapid ride over difficult

ground, were falling with fatigue. We went up to the caravanserai, and there learned that the postal *employés* were 'gone away,' and that there were no horses. Here was a predicament, inasmuch as I was in a desperate hurry, and had already lost much time. Nothing remained but to halt for a couple of hours to let our poor worn-out animals repose, and to give them some food, of which they were evidently much in need. We had to pay for this food, as there were no Government officials to be found. While waiting for our tired steeds to recover, we sat in the scanty shade of a thinly-leafed plane-tree, and had breakfast. Not far away was a Kurd encampment, which hitherto had not been visible, hidden, as it was, behind a hill shoulder. The Kurd tents were peculiar. I had previously seen them on the mountains between Kars and Erzeroum. The walls, about four and a half feet in height, are composed of reed mats; the reeds are placed vertically, close together, and connected by four threads of camel hair, intertwined horizontally with the reeds at regular intervals. The roof consists of a single web of blackish brown camel-hair tissue, supported on internal poles some six feet high, the edges not meeting the vertical reed matting, but leaving a space of six inches in width intervening for light and air. The tents look exceedingly neat and comfortable, much more so than the heavier Turcoman *kibitkas*, among which I had been so long sojourning. The old Kurd elders came out of their camp to see the Ferenghi, and were most kind in looking after some of our horses which had run away. Had the road in any way approximated to a level one I should not have been so much troubled, worn though the poor beasts were after their long and quick ride. But, unfortunately, we had to face the worst portion of the entire road, the tremendous pass of Kharzon, across the steepest part of the Elburz mountains by which the transit is possible.

There was no help for it, so we rode away towards the entrance. In the valley we had to ford a rather violent torrent, fortunately not deep, and we were rewarded for our pains by a curious sight—the moving of a Kurd encampment. These nomads acknowledge but a very slight allegiance to the central Government, and pay still slighter taxes. The women seemed to do all the work. The men rode on tranquilly—that is to say, the men who had horses, for I noticed that horses were scarce among them. The beasts of burden were small black cows, upon whose backs were strapped all the paraphernalia of the camp. The reed tent-walls were rolled together with the black camel-hair roofs, and on these, packed on the cows' backs, was perched a miscellaneous collection of poultry, evidently well accustomed to such proceedings. An occasional cat was also to be seen, seated contentedly among the fowls. A few men rode to and fro, directing the *cortège*. They were, as a rule, of low stature, and far different in appearance from the wild horsemen whom I had left behind me on the Turcoman plains.

Each step brought us nearer to the tremendous Kharzon pass. To describe its passage would be only to multiply tenfold what I have already written about break-neck roads and dangerous precipices. We passed many Kurd camps, and at one witnessed funeral rites exactly like those of the Turcomans. Towards the higher portions of the pass, which I believe are about twelve thousand feet above the sea, was an Imam Zadé, or burial-place of a saint. Each person who passed felt bound to place one stone on another in token of reverence. The road was lined with pyramids of stone fragments contributed by the pious during past centuries. After having been forced to dismount a dozen times, sometimes beyond our knees in gravelly mud, we at length, after twelve hours' riding on the same poor horses, got to the village of Masrah, in the plain which reaches

away by Kasvin to Teheran. This village is not without interest, though it is but a poor place—consisting of little more than fifty square-topped huts huddled within the limits of a mud loop-holed wall with flanking towers. The interest attaching to the village is altogether an entomological one. When starting from Resht I had received many warnings from experts to look out for an exceedingly venomous insect which infests this neighbourhood. Strange to say, this place alone of all the entire district is so infested. I enter into details on the subject, as it is one which cannot fail to interest naturalists. I had been warned, on the peril of my life, not to sleep at Masrah, because there was to be found the *garrib-gez* (literally, 'bite the stranger'). The effect of the bite was described to me as being on the whole much worse than that of the black scorpion. Our horses could carry us no further, and, nathless the dread which I had of these creatures, I was obliged to make a halt of half an hour at the station.

One of the first questions which I asked of the stable attendants was whether they could show me a specimen of the 'bite the stranger.' After a few minutes' search, the man brought me out half-a-dozen in the palm of his hand. The largest was not over the third of an inch in length, and resembled in form what is vulgarly known in England as the 'sheep-tick.' It was of a silvery grey appearance, and had, as I carefully remarked, eight legs, four on each side. I should at once have set it down as one of the arachnoid or spider family were it not for the entire absence of the dual division of *cephalothorax* and abdomen which distinguishes that class. Notwithstanding this, it may, and probably does, belong to the family in question. Its sting is productive of the worst results. A small red point like that produced by the ordinary flea is at first seen. Then follows a large black spot, which subsequently suppurates, accom-

panied by a high fever, identical, as far as external symptoms go, with intermittent fever. In this it is like the bite of the tarantula or *phalange* of the Turcoman plains. The only difference is, that the fever produced by the sting of this insect, known scientifically as the *arga Persica*, and locally as the *garrib-gez* and *Genné*, if neglected for any length of time, is fatal. It is accompanied by lassitude, loss of appetite, and in some cases delirium. I have seen it mentioned in an old French book, which gives an account of the French Embassy to Teheran of 1806–7; but the writer had no personal experiences to relate. He called it the *mouche de Miane*. Miana is a village on the same stream as Masrah, and is well known as one of the *habitats* of this pestilential insect. It is styled by the inhabitants, as at the other places in which it obtains, the 'bite the stranger,' for the people of the locality never experience any inconvenience from its sting. There is a general belief that, when once a person has been stung, the 'Persian bug' is harmless against the same individual, and this seems to be borne out by fact; for the people living in the village of Masrah laughed at my fears as I carefully perched myself on the top of a rock with a view of keeping out of the way of the local bugs, while they held them with impunity within the palms of their hands. Some Austrian officers going to Teheran in 1879, happening to stay at this hamlet of Masrah, were stung by the *garrib-gez*. All of them fell ill, and one narrowly escaped with his life. Numerous cases of death can be cited as the result of the sting of the *arga Persica*. A Persian medical man informed me that it was the custom, when any important personage was travelling through a district infested by these insects, for his attendants to administer to him without his knowledge one of the 'bugs,' during the early morning, concealed in a piece of bread. The sting acts as a kind of inoculation, and

the local physicians believe that the poison, taken through the stomach, is administered with equally good effect as if received directly into the circulation. A leading European member of Teheran society told me that he had simultaneously received seventy-three stings from these insects, the bites having been counted by his servants. The result was an extreme amount of fever, winding up with delirium on the fifth day. Violent emetics, followed by doses of quinine, were given without effect; and it was only after taking large quantities of tannin, in the form of a decoction of the rind of the wild pomegranate, that the patient recovered. For a great part of my information on this subject I have to thank Mr. Sydney Churchill, of Teheran, a young and rising naturalist, who has devoted much of his time and talent to the entomology of Persia. I need scarcely say that, finding myself in contact with this abominable 'Persian bug,' I was in a feverish hurry to get out of its dominions; and more than one severe objurgation rose to my lips before the half-hour's chase after several stag-like horses on the hill-slope was completed.

I was contemplating in a melancholy mood the skeletons of seven horses lying close by, without doubt the victims of overwork and little food, when our new steeds were driven in from pasture on a bleak mountain side, to commence a run of twenty miles at post speed. I make express mention of this, in order that it may, if possible, reach the Shah's ears indirectly; and that, if he have not pity on the travellers who come to visit his capital from the Caspian, he will cherish some feeling for the poor half-starved brutes that are ridden over the hills of which he is sovereign. I write this advisedly, for I have reason to know that he is most anxious that the affairs of his kingdom should be properly conducted; but, unfortunately, he is dependent for information on those whose interest it is not to tell him the

truth. I hope that, should these lines ever meet his eyes, he will give me credit for the intention with which they were written.

Descending from the mountains, a vast plain opens out to the view. Sparsely-sprinkled gardens, with their tall poplars and densely-leaved *chenars*, tremble in the mirage like wooded islands in a tranquil sea. The proximity to the dangerous Turcoman frontier, notwithstanding the intervening range of the Elburz, across which I had just ridden, was marked by fortified villages and caravanserais. Each was a fortress in itself—a square of from a hundred to a hundred and fifty yards on each side, protected by high embattled walls of unbaked brick, with flanking towers fifteen feet high at intervals of forty yards. The gateway of each stronghold was a little fort in itself, and Biblical descriptions came forcibly to my mind as we saw the white-robed elders (smoking their water-pipes) seated on either side the entry with a more than patriarchal solemnity, the attendants in robes of Oriental brilliancy, raising their heads to stare at the unholy Giaours dashing by as quickly as their poor weary, sore-backed steeds would permit. In riding over this plain I discovered the solution of a problem which had often puzzled me. I had seen small earth mounds ranged in a symmetrical row reaching for miles and miles. I now discovered that they were composed of the earth thrown up from numerous shafts during the construction of what are called *kanots*, or underground watercourses, leading from the mountains to the plain below. From the Elburz range to Teheran vegetable life is artificially sustained on the bleak internal Steppes by means of these subterranean watercourses. Putting our horses to a gallop, we were soon sweeping by the scanty vineyards that surround Kasvin, and the yellow, turreted walls of that town came into view.

Kasvin, the birthplace of the Sage Lockman, and for a brief space the capital of Persia, is a very considerable town, and destined, when the projected railroad from Resht to Teheran shall have been completed, to play an important *rôle* in the history of the country. Seen from the midst of the vineyards and pistache plantations which surround it, it presents an eminently picturesque appearance, with its brightly gleaming cupolas and towers glinting beyond the *chenar* groves which surround its walls. The gate by which I entered, pierced in its western fortifications, is guarded by the usual towers of unbaked brick, plastered over with yellowish brown clay. Just outside it, and reaching up to the edge of the now dry ditch, is an extensive cemetery, remarkable for its tombstones, which lie flat upon the graves, being in this totally unlike the standing 'turban stones' of the Ottoman Turks. In the midst of each is inserted a piece of white alabaster, a couple of feet long, in the form of a heraldic shield, bearing a raised inscription and the representation of a long spouted jug like a coffee-pot and some cups and tumblers. This may have some connection with the custom of the Turcoman nomads of placing these articles on the graves.

The afternoon sun was intensely hot as I rode along between the blank staring mud walls which rose on either side of the street, almost deserted at that hour of the day. A few people were lazily lounging in some barbers' shops, or stretched out at full length asleep upon the ground in the narrow shade of the houses. Several *kanots* traverse the town, and the vertical shafts constructed when excavating them lie most reprehensibly open in the midst of the thoroughfares. A horseman or pedestrian traversing the streets after dark would infallibly come to grief. Kasvin affords on every side evidences of its past greatness, and signs of growing importance mingle with the older traces of

prosperity. Mosques and towers, their roofs covered with glazed blue tiles, rose on every side, and I much regretted not having sufficient time at my disposal to visit them. The postal establishment would do credit to a first-class European town. It includes a large hotel, with arched portico supported on massive pillars of whitewashed brick. The rooms are spacious and airy, and floored with large, square, glazed tiles. This hotel cannot fail to be a paying speculation when once the Resht-Teheran Railway line is established. The principal town gates, and those of some of the chief public buildings, are really very pretty. They are of the Eastern ogive form, ornamented with curious pinnacles, with bud-like extremities, forcibly reminding one of asparagus shoots. They are profusely ornamented with designs in enamelled brick and tiles of the brightest colours. The brick patterns are mostly black, blue, white, and orange, producing, in the blinding glare of an Eastern sun, an indescribably brilliant effect. In the spaces over the arches, and in the side panels, are large, fairly executed designs in enamelled tiles, representing the Lion and Sun, and various scenes from Persian mythology and history. These buildings, with their brilliant colouring, reminded me forcibly of the drawings of the restored palaces of Nineveh.

The road from Kasvin to Teheran is a marvellous improvement on that between the former town and Resht, which is so exceedingly bad as scarcely to merit the name of road. In fact, the natural surface of the country, left as it originally stood, would be infinitely preferable to the present frightful track—half mud-hole, half quarry. The road leading southward from Kasvin owes a good deal to its course lying over a level sandy plain; but its condition is remarkably good. It is at least forty feet wide, well drained, and kept in good order. The postmaster of Kasvin

is, as I was informed there, a Pole; and the assistants and grooms are either Russian or German. We were provided with capital horses, in first-rate condition, and the rapid pace at which we cleared the first stage of about twenty-four miles was luxurious compared to the tediously crawling and aggravating progress over the more northerly track. Owing to the good condition of the road between Kasvin and Teheran, *troïkas* have been supplied, and are available for travellers who do not like to proceed on horseback, while the entire road reflects the greatest credit on those to whose charge it is entrusted. I regret not to be able to say the same thing of the condition in which we found the post horses at many stations. The animals were excellent in their way; but it was evident before one had made a quarter of a mile on their backs that they were either half-starved or overworked. The infrequency of travellers along this route, especially those travelling by post, renders it impossible that the animals could be overworked by legitimate traffic. I was informed on good authority that in some cases postmasters either use the horses, which they are supposed to hold in readiness for the public service, on their own farms, or else let them out to others for a similar purpose. So it happens that the traveller on arriving at the station finds the horses intended for his use, and for which he has paid at a high rate, so completely broken down by their day's labour as to be incapable of proceeding at anything like the required pace over the sixteen or twenty miles which separate the post-houses. For instance, the horses we obtained at Kishlak station, at which we arrived at nine o'clock on the evening of our departure from Kasvin, and which we left at five o'clock on the following morning, were, though very fair animals, in such a wretchedly fatigued condition that we were obliged to dismount within two miles of the next station and send on a messenger to obtain help to get

our saddles and baggage up to the post-house. On another stage our postboy's horse broke down completely, and we had to wait three hours for him at Yengi Imam. The horses we obtained there were in the same deplorable condition; and it was only on reaching Hissarek post-house that we were furnished with proper animals. At this last station we were supplied with spirited little grey ponies, who sometimes carried us a good deal quicker than we wished to go. The good condition of the horses at Hissarek, and the rapidity with which they carried us, showed what a well-disposed, honest postmaster could do. In fact, with the exception of the arrangements at Kasvin and the horses supplied to us when leaving that town, as well as those from Hissarek to Teheran, there could not possibly be found a worse conducted posting system. In the horses we found poor overworked beasts; in the men, people endowed with all the provoking slowness and *insouciance* of Spaniards, without a trace of the honesty and manliness which are the redeeming qualities of the latter.

The country on either side the high road is well cultivated, and numerous villages occur at short intervals. They are all, without exception, surrounded by tall, strong mud walls with circular flanking towers. It is curious to note that, almost invariably, in close proximity to these villages are large earthen mounds, somewhat similar to those one meets with on the Turcoman plains, but greatly inferior in dimensions. These mounds have traces of extensive earthworks about their bases, indicating that the sites of the modern villages are almost coincident with the ancient ones, dating back to almost prehistoric times, when these earth mounds supported the citadels which served as places of refuge to the inhabitants in time of invasion. To the left of the road the plain is dotted by the long lines of small earth mounds which denote the tracks of the *kanots*, and

which are the only available means by which the arid plains are kept fruitful during the withering summer heats. Owing to the source of each being at the bottom of a very deep well at the foot, or low down on the slope, of some neighbouring hills, these streams are independent of the melting snows for their water supply; and the fact of their channels lying deep beneath the surface of the earth prevents the great evaporation which would occur did they trickle along the surface, also keeping the water cool and in a drinkable condition. These streams issue to the surface at the level portions of the plain, where they serve alike for the irrigation of the fields and the water supply of the villages.

Between Kasvin and Teheran one comes upon traces of genuine European civilisation—due, if I be not mistaken, to the Count de Monteforte, the Police Minister of his Majesty the Shah. It is true that for many a long league the police stations, situated eight miles apart, were little more than half-completed buildings; but as we got closer to the capital we came upon pleasant little lodges, in some cases ornamented with incipient creeping plants, and always with well-uniformed gendarmerie before the door. These little places, with their public functionaries, are agreeable interruptions of the uncivilised nakedness of the rest of the road. But Persia is only in her transition state as yet. The country round Teheran is by no means attractive. It looks sadly bare and sunburnt, relieved only by the strictly limited gardens, the result of laborious irrigation, which break the yellow-gray expanse of plain. Half the verdure one sees belongs to gardens attaching to the many residences possessed by the Shah in the neighbourhood of the town. The deep green foliage of the plane-trees (*chenar*) looked painfully prominent against the dreary background of ashy-yellow plain which sweeps away to the

foot of the Elburz mountains, then deeply covered with snow. It is one of the most tantalising things possible to ride a last stage across the plain, where the air is thick with dun-brown dust, and to see the giant peaks towering, seemingly within hand's reach, all white with snowy caps —long silvery streaks coming down claw-like along their sides. It makes one feel doubly hot and thirsty. Even close to the city itself gardens and villages are enclosed by tall mud walls, with the inevitable flanking towers. The deplorable traditions of scarce a century ago still live in this system of *quasi*-fortification. On approaching Teheran the town presents not the slightest striking feature. Were not one advised beforehand of his approach to the place, he would never guess that he was in the proximity of the capital of Persia. Some narrow yellow streaks indicate the presence of ramparts—a bad imitation of the ramparts of Paris. Not a single cupola or spire strikes the eye. The fact is, there are none at Teheran. The gate by which one enters is, like those of Kasvin, neatly ornamented with enamelled bricks and tile pictures, a feature which predominates in Persian architecture. When even the site of Teheran shall be a puzzle to archæologists, its painted tiles, with their quaint representations of modern soldiery, and even of coaches, will be a solace to the antiquary—even more so than the sculptured walls of Nineveh—for the colours will remain. Of the fortifications I need say but little. They are apparently copied from the old ramparts of Paris, and strictly adhere to Vauban's system—in trace, at least. In profile they are subject to Persian modifications. The scarp, which, as my military readers will know, is the portion of the wall below the level of the plane of site, is of raw earth, left to stand or fall at a steep slope, as may best suit itself. The exterior slope of the parapet, that which would undergo the ordeal

of battering during a regular siege, while being at the orthodox slope of forty-five degrees, is plastered up with yellow mud for the sake of appearances. There is not a trace of an exterior fort to cover the approaches to the town, and the watercourses on which it so entirely depends. I wondered at this all the more that there were so many highly experienced European officers in the town engaged in organising the Persian military system. Of this I shall have more to say later on. For the moment I leave my readers as I gallop within the ramparts into a wide, barren, dusty space, where one sees little sign of a metropolis.

## CHAPTER XX.

### TEHERAN.

Defences of Teheran—General aspect of town—Groves and gardens—British Legation—Boulevards—Gas lamps—Electric light—Cannon square—Gun from Delhi—Shah's palace—Newly organized regiments—Uniform—Arms—Austrian officers—Captain Standeisky—Gymnastics—Care of arms—Captain Wagner and the artillery—Persian Cossacks—Colonel Demontovitch—Visit to cavalry barracks—Old soldiers *v.* new—Baron Reuter's contract—Shah's red umbrella—Royal cavalcade—Shah's carriage—Ladies of the harem—'Be blind, be blind!'—Novel military salute—Departure of Austrian officers—Rumoured advent of Russian organisers.

THE fortifications of Teheran are, strictly speaking, on Vauban's system, that is to say, on the system of those of Paris—the *enceinte* up to the date of the Franco-German campaign. It seems to me strange that his Majesty the Shah, who goes to so much trouble and expense in employing foreign officers to organise his army, should not have thought it worth his while to engage a few military engineers to supervise the modelling of the defensive works of his capital. For aught I know he may have secured some such assistance; but perchance they are like those of whom Lord Byron tells us in 'Don Juan,' who were employed to construct the fortifications of Ismail, and who, as the Turks found to their cost, did more for the assailants than for the besieged. The defences of Teheran, as they at present stand, are much more harmful than otherwise. Under the hypothesis that the works are good for something, an assaulting army has the right to bombard an enclosed capital or other town. Even Paris, with its 'scientific'

*enceinte* and outlying forts, was far from adequate to repel the means of attack available to the Teuton beleaguerers. What, then, shall we say of the ill-constructed ramparts of Teheran, without a single outwork? In one day the enemy would erect his bombarding batteries, and in another, Teheran would be in ashes, or surrendered.

Very probably the existing works were constructed as a capable means of resisting a *coup d'état* from without, for the present Kadjar dynasty has been too short a time on the throne to forget the events which placed it there. But to-day the rulers of Persia ought to remember that the danger is not of Turcomans or rival tribes, but that, though coming from farther off, it is not a whit less serious.

Though the ramparts lack military strength, the artistic beauty of the gates of Teheran is undeniable. The traveller from colder and more practical climes, on coming in sight of the portals of the Persian capital, is at once carried back to the days when he read the 'Arabian Nights' and gloated over the exploits of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid. It is really touching to find this sentiment of beauty lingering amidst the wreck of the once mighty power of Persia, and it would be but ill grace on the part of the passing stranger to withhold his appreciation of it. Coming in from the parched plains, where at long intervals only, and by dint of artificial irrigation, vegetation is to be met with, across the quivering mirage there rises an arched and pinnacled edifice, all aglow with tints borrowed from the setting sun as it bids its adieu to the surrounding hills. One feels that though 'Iran's sun be set for ever,' politically at any rate, some traces of its old glory remain in the arches which give access to its present capital. The graceful outlines, the mingled colours glowing on brick and tile over the almost Alhambric arches, bring one back to his early dreams of the East, even though a sad experience has taught that

beneath this gloss lies a misery almost as deep as that of the back slums of civilisation.

The space enclosed by the walls is much greater than that occupied by the streets, squares, and buildings, very considerable distances intervening between the exterior houses and the fortifications. The general aspect of the town conveys to one's mind the idea of a strange mixture of mingled desolation and suddenly occurring, exuberant foliage. The zone immediately within the ramparts is mainly an expanse of arid yellow earth, broken by gravel-pits and fragments of mud walls. Here and there are portions of earthworks and batteries erected under the supervision of the European training officers during a course of military instruction. Between Teheran and the bases of the mountains the plain slopes upwards, and is copiously sprinkled with gardens and plantations, all of them supported by artificial irrigation. As I have already explained, this irrigation is not effected by natural surface streams, but by means of those curious underground water-courses termed *kanots*, which, commencing at the bottom of a deep boring close to the foot of the lower hills, are ultimately made to issue to the surface at lower levels, the greater portion of their course being protected from the sun's rays by the overlying earth. As far as one can judge, the soil round Teheran is most fertile, needing only an adequate water supply to be rendered wonderfully productive. The artificial watercourses which exist appear to be mainly devoted to the support of groves of plane-trees (*chenar*), pomegranate, and poplar, destined as pleasure-gardens, and to the furnishing of the necessary drinking water to the city. Little seemed to have been done as regards the irrigation of corn-fields, though the ripening crops looked promising, and bade fair to more than counterbalance the effect of the drought of the preceding year.

The grounds of the British Legation afford a good example of what skilled gardening can effect, even in such a broiling climate as that of Persia. They are situated apart from the inhabited portion of the city, but within the walls, and, I venture to say, are altogether unrivalled by any similar native attempts, though many very large gardens belonging both to the Shah and his nobles occur within the *enceinte*. Still, even with its water basins and running streams, and their shady alleys of *chenars*, weeping willows, and mulberry, the heat becomes so intense about the beginning of June that it is found necessary to remove the staff of the Legation to the midsummer residence at the foot of the Elburz, about two *farsakhs* (eight miles) from Teheran, and, I believe, nearly a thousand feet above its level. Here, though at mid-day hours the temperature is far from agreeable, it is much more bearable than in the city below. Through the kindness of Mr. R. F. Thomson, the British Minister, whose guest I was for the moment, I was able to appreciate the difference between the two.

The modern portions of Teheran display a strange mixture of eastern and western styles. Leading from the principal gate of the British Legation in the direction of the main entrance of the Shah's palace is a long boulevard, arranged as nearly as possible after the method of a Parisian one. It will be a very pretty avenue indeed when the well-watered trees have arrived at maturity. These trees, though but from seven to nine years old, have already assumed respectable dimensions. Mingled with them at intervals were strange objects for a Persian city—regular street gas lamps. Unfortunately, the French gentleman charged with the production of the necessary gas had not been able to carry out to its full extent the contract into which he had entered with the Government. This, I understood, was because the necessary funds were no

forthcoming with the requisite rapidity. In one or two places the electric light had been established, but it was only in front of the main gate of the palace that the light was ever displayed, unless on exceptionally festive occasions. The lamp-posts were a standing source of wonder to the inhabitants, who could not well understand why they had been placed *in situ* without producing any of the wonderful effects which they had been led to believe they were capable of. When passing through Teheran on my way back to Europe, I found that an attempt had been made to inaugurate the undertaking. By the exercise of great energy about twenty gas jets had been placed round the cannon square. The Shah had been expected to be present, but was not.[1] In his absence the ceremonials were presided over by his two sons. After the lighting of these few lamps, things subsided into their old, non-progressive condition. I am afraid that, even with the best intentions on the part of the municipal authorities, the boulevard of Teheran will not present any attractive appearance, at least for a long time. Luxuriant foliage and street lamps may be present in abundance, but the shops will not be much improved by them. These shops line the thoroughfare like a series of railway arches. In the East a man stays in his shop until near sundown, and then retires to his dwelling, which is generally in a distant part of the town. The gas lamps could only help to disclose a series of ground-floor cells, barricaded with very indifferent-looking shutters. Following the main boulevard one arrives at a large, picturesque entrance, quite like the city gates, and as prettily decorated. Massive iron-barred portals, when necessary, close this opening. It gives access to a large, bare, paved square,

[1] I have been informed that his absence on this occasion was due to his dread of an explosion, which persons hostile to the undertaking had persuaded him was not only possible, but probable.

one side of which shows a number of arched compartments, with glazed windows, within which are kept sundry seedy-looking bronze twelve-pounder smooth-bore guns. On the right-hand side are half-a-dozen huge brass guns, twenty-four and thirty-two pounders, on siege carriages. They are, as the dates show, from forty to sixty years old, and their scored and torn bores tell tales of many a bag of nails and many a dozen paving-stones discharged from them. They are probably displayed in their present position, guarded by a score of Oriental-looking artillerymen, with a view of conveying to the popular mind a hint of what the Government could do if truculently disposed. At the side opposite to that by which one enters is another picturesque gateway, just within which stands a very long and highly-decorated bronze gun—a sixty-four pounder, I should say, from its calibre. The popular idea in Teheran is that this is the largest gun in the world. It was brought from Delhi by Nadir Shah, after his capture of that city.

Continuing our route, we pass along another street, not yet a boulevard, the same railway-arch-like shops predominating. Then we are in front of the main palace gateway. It is of enamelled brick, white stucco, and sea-green paint. Like the tower palace at Enzeli, fragments of looking-glass enter largely into the composition of the very peculiar composite pilasters of its upper stories. When the sun's rays fall obliquely, the effect of these numerous mirrors is very pretty; otherwise the less said about it the better. It was in front of this palace gate that, for the first time, the uniform of the newly-organised Persian regiments came under my notice. It is very serviceable, and quite smart-looking. All the more so, to European eyes at least, that it differs from the horridly slovenly-looking full-hipped tunic worn under the old *régime*, notably by the officer. It consists of a garment half tunic, half atigue blouse, of

coarse blue navy serge, very short in the skirt, and girt with a brown leather belt. The trousers are of the same material. The head-dress is a small shako of black curled lambs' wool, with a brass badge, carried in front, behind, or at the side, according to the taste of each soldier. It is a remarkable fact that while the majority of the troops at Teheran are armed with the Austrian Werndl breech-loader, a most serviceable weapon, the palace guard carry the old-fashion muzzle-loading rifle of the same nation. It is a deeply-grooved rifle, with bright barrel, and the peculiar kind of stock with cheek piece formerly carried by certain Austrian corps. The Shah thinks too well of his subjects in the capital to consider a practical guard necessary, and leaves the improved weapons in the hands of the soldiers who are learning to defend their country, 'if necessary, against England,' as a Persian officer one day told me very frankly. As I am on army subjects I may as well say a word about the foreign officers brought from Austria to organise the battalions of the Shah. During my stay at Teheran I paid an early visit to the barracks organised under the surveillance of Captain Standeisky, of the Austrian service. As a feature of European training—a very unusual one in an Eastern army—I noticed the great attention paid to gymnastics and preliminary drill. The recruiting system in Persia leaves much to be desired; but nevertheless it brings to the ranks a very large majority of stalwart young men, in every way fitted to be soldiers. Like all peasants, they are more or less uncouth in their manners and bearing, and require a little preliminary schooling before they can be placed in the ranks musket in hand. The Austrian officers in charge knew, and none better than Captain Standeisky, that however good the absolutely fighting element may be, and however steadily the men may stand in actual combat, there is something else

required in a soldier. He has a duty to perform anent the civilians at home, as well as in front of an enemy. It would never do to have a lumbering troop of fighting clod-hoppers marching down a thoroughfare in any street in a European capital, much less a Persian one. I have seen gymnastic exercises carried out in most European armies, and can say that in many of them the men would have no occasion to be ashamed of what I witnessed in one of the Teheran barrack squares. I saw the heavy-weight exercise, the trapeze, the bridge, the vaulting exercise, and many others, most creditably gone through; and I saw the same men go through company and battalion drill with great accuracy. My visit was an impromptu one, so that no special preparations could have been made beforehand, even had such a thing been possible. As the companies marched into quarters I was invited to examine the rifles. The interiors of the barrels were bright as silver, the locks in perfect order, and there was not a soil except what was inevitable after an hour's exercise. As a last trial, I saw the performance of a company crossing a dead wall twenty-five feet in height, forming pyramid, twelve men as a base, the last carrying a rope over with him. It was most creditably done, the only drawback being the merriment of the men at being put through the extra exercise for the benefit of a stranger. Captain Wagner, of the Artillery, had brought his men as near perfection as possible; and it is no small thing to be said in favour of these gentlemen that they have had to form their officers as well as their men.

The cavalry comes under the control of a different nationality. In this particular the Russians in Persia bear away the palm. Colonel Demontovitch, late of the army corps of General Tergukasoff at Bayazid during the Turco-Russian campaign, was charged with the formation of some

regiments of Cossacks on the Russian model. I have to return him my best thanks for the pains which he took to show me all the smallest details of the corps entrusted to his charge. He told me that while the Austrian officers had to apply to the Persian Government for each sum required, either for organisation or for the purpose of building quarters, he had *carte blanche*. I must say that no man ever turned his discretionary powers to greater advantage. I could judge of this, not from the appearance of his embryonic squadrons when they were paraded to meet the Shah, but from a visit to the quarters of his soldiers. It seems that the Shah, during his European tour, took a great fancy to the Cossack cavalry. He was not carried away by the outward show and glitter of more pretentious horsemen, such as we have at home, for instance; he wished to have some regiments of the long-coated sober-looking cavalry he had seen in a neighbouring territory. I have seen the Cossacks in the field—in action in fact; and I think it is not derogatory to them to say that Colonel Demontovich's men are but little behind them in general style. It is true that the favourable contrast which they make with the mass of the Persian troops is due to a certain extent to the kind of Draconic discipline to which they are subjected; and which, after all, is just barely what is necessary to make latter-day Persians understand what real soldiering means. I saw them on one occasion when his Majesty the Shah was paying one of his annual visits to his Prime Minister. The newly Austrian-drilled infantry were standing at ease, but keeping their ranks; and in front of them I saw the traditional soldiers of Persia in their slovenly garments, their attitudes 'at ease' more than any military code would have permitted. I saw the 'old fogey' officers sitting on their haunches smoking their water-pipes, and little troubling themselves whether it was

the Shah or anybody else who was coming by. And a little higher up I saw Demontovitch's Cossacks, on foot, drawn up 'at ease,' more accurately aligned than ever the 'old fogies' could have put themselves 'at attention.' I could perceive too that when his Majesty the Shah rode by, preceded by his running footmen and surrounded by his great officers of State, his eyes turned lovingly to the long still ranks of the dismounted cavalry, their swords blazing in the noontide sun—just as they had been for five hours before. It was perhaps a little wanton exercise of despotic power to keep these poor willing men, needlessly incurring the risk of sunstroke, for so long; but there they were, motionless all the same. I subsequently visited their quarters. We came suddenly on them. The men were in their white summer tunics, scrupulously clean. On the first notice of our approach they were at once drawn up in the stables. The horses were glossy with frequent combing; the place was carefully swept up. I only make this statement in fairness to what I have seen of the work of European officers in Persia. But let me add another, made by an officer of long experience in that country. 'You see what they are now; when we are gone, in six months all will be the same as if we never had been here.' So much for European military training and its prospects in Persia.

The Shah is no doubt influenced by the best of motives. He has visited Europe, and has probably gauged the means by which Western men have become what they are. He does his best to follow in their track; but he is impotent before the inertia of a nation. Everyone is familiar with the history of Baron Reuter's contract. Its fulfilment would have cost the Shah his throne. He dared not name as Grand Vizier the only man of intellect in his country whom he could trust, because of popular prejudice, Hussein Khan having been a strong supporter of the railway

project. As I saw the monarch ride by under the shade of his red umbrella, which he carries as an emblem of sovereignty, I could not help thinking that he was, perhaps, the man most to be pitied in all Persia. Speaking of his riding past, I know that since the royal visit to Europe people are apt to figure to themselves the Shah of Persia as living amid a perpetual blaze of diamonds. The following was my experience of one of his progresses. Some mounted policemen (Austrian style) came galloping ahead. Then came some two hundred people, most of them with double-barrelled fowling-pieces slung at their backs. After these rode fifty men with silver maces, and then a very plainly clad group, in the midst of which was the Shah, not to be distinguished from the rest of the company, for, as the sun was not shining, he had furled his red umbrella. Behind the group immediately surrounding the Shah came his state coach, in pattern closely resembling that of the Lord Mayor of London, but looking very much the worse for wear, some of the battered corners being badly in need of repainting and gilding. Along the by-streets rolled some lumbering carriages, preceded by a dozen men bearing long willow wands. They were the keepers of the harem, and they shouted incessantly, 'Be blind, be blind; turn your faces to the wall.' This was intended to prevent any of the crowd from being rash enough to catch a glimpse of the ladies of the harem who were being conveyed to await his Majesty's pleasure at his next halting-place. The European officers in the Shah's service were of course required to turn their backs when these ladies appeared, but they were also supposed to salute them in military fashion. The result of the combined movement was somewhat absurd, as the officer was obliged to carry his hand with outstretched fingers to the back of his head instead of to his brow.

Nearly two years subsequently, the whole of the

Austrian officers left Teheran, called home by their own sovereign. During my homeward voyage up the Caspian I was accompanied by three of them—Captain Standeisky, Baron Kreuse, and an elderly major who had acted as principal instructor at the military school of Teheran. Captain Wagner was detained until a few days later, owing to ill-health. At the time of the withdrawal of these officers it was currently rumoured that their places would be filled by others like Colonel Demontovitch, lent to Persia for organising purposes by the Czar.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### TEHERAN (*continued*).

The bazaar—Persian yashmak—Constantinople police edict—The town as it is—The Shah visiting his First Minister—A long wait—Police—The *cortège*—Shah's running footmen—Apes and baboons—Scattering flowers—Hopes for the future—A Persian saying—Conceited Persian officer—An explanation—A visit to the Russian Minister—Skobeleff's telegram—'Au revoir à Merv'—Interview with the Sipah Salar Aazam—A diplomatic conversation—Russo-Persian frontier—Why I changed sides—Dr. Tholozan—The military situation—An unpleasant prospect.

ONE day I wended my way towards the bazaar, for through it lay my road to the older portions of the town, which I wished to compare with the more Europeanised boulevards described in the last chapter. I crossed a number of large squares, and traversed long, sunburnt streets flanking the tall Assyrian-looking walls of unbaked brick, ornamented with blue, black, and yellow glazed bricks, which enclose the precincts of the palace. Some of the quarters had that disagreeable appearance which marks an English town in the course of erection or demolition. Everything was dry and dusty; bricks, plaster, and earth heaps lay all around. At intervals one came across a stream, looking singularly out of place—an offshoot of one of the numerous *kanots* which supply the town with water. One plunges suddenly out of the scorching, glaring sunlight, beneath a coloured brick archway, where for a moment, after the withering blaze outside, the darkness of night seems to prevail. It is one of the entrances to the bazaar. The

sensation is delightfully fresh and cool after the suffocating temperature of the hot, dusty streets, inundated by the deluge of fiery light; and the currents of air striking the face give the feeling of a plunge into a cold bath. Long ogive vaulted arcades, thirty feet in height, and lighted by circular openings in the roof at intervals of twenty feet, lead away in half-a-dozen different directions. On either side of these passages are tall alcoves, the shops of the merchants. They are simply vaulted openings, the floors of which are raised some three feet above the level of the roadway, the various articles of merchandise being exposed on small wooden steps, rising towards the interior, where sits the merchant. The arrangement is similar to that seen in most Eastern bazaars, from Stamboul to Hindostan. Each trade is carried on in its separate avenue, though in the main thoroughfares grocers, mercers, general merchants, and iced sherbet sellers congregate, together with an occasional *kebabdji*, or cook. The Armenian traders do not usually affect the bazaars. They either form caravanserais apart, or have their shops—quite on the European model, with glazed windows, counters, and all the other accessories of modern civilisation—in the great open squares of which I have already spoken.

On getting well into the main bazaar the salient feature of the place is the confused and overwhelming babel of sounds which strike the ear. In one avenue there arises the din of a hundred coppersmiths, sledging away at their anvils while manufacturing pots, kettles, and other utensils. In the next perhaps an equal number of persons are yelling out, extolling the excellence of their wares, or trying to converse with one another from their shops on opposite sides of the way, pitching their voices to the utmost to dominate the hubbub around and the din of the passers-by. We are generally supposed to believe that

the Eastern is, *par excellence*, a silent, sedate kind of person. According to my experience he is the noisiest individual on the face of the earth. In the narrow way between the shops a motley multitude hurries by, each one jostling the other without the least regard for mutual convenience. Any one having a brass plate on his hat, or being in the slightest way connected with an official personage, seems to believe it his privilege to run a-muck at full speed, amidst all and singular the ordinary wayfarers. The only exception to this seemed to be the police, whom in all cases I found exceedingly civil and inoffensive, and affording a shining example in this respect to other Government *employés*, not only in Persia, but elsewhere. There are veiled women, and, unlike those in Constantinople, they are really veiled. In Stamboul the yashmak of the upper classes is used but to enhance natural attractions—an extra means in the hands of coquetry. In Persia the veil is a sober downright thing of its kind, worn in sober earnest, especially when husbands or acquaintances are by. The Stamboul yashmak consists of two pieces of the lightest possible gauze, one across the forehead, the other across the mouth and drooping below the chin. Here it is one piece of serious white linen bound around the top of the forehead, and falling to below the breast, tapering as it falls. In some cases there is a kind of knitted work in front of the eyes, enabling the wearer to see where she is going, but utterly impermeable to external eyes. Sometimes a lady will raise her substantial face-covering and throw it back over one shoulder, but at the most distant sight of the hostile sex the covering is replaced. It must be a perfect martyrdom to these poor ladies, in this atrociously hot weather, to have this jealous cloth hanging over nose and mouth. I know that of an evening, when I threw the lightest of muslin across my face to keep off the mosquitoes

and sand-flies, in half a minute I began to feel symptoms of apoplexy; and, as a rule, I preferred the persecution of winged tormentors to existence, so far as sensation was concerned, in a perpetual *hammam*.

I recollect a Minister of Police in Constantinople levelling an edict against the bright-coloured mantles of the Stamboul ladies, and warning them, under pain of a heavy fine, to have their external shroud-like envelope of becomingly sober tints. In Teheran he would have had nothing but applause for the parallel garments of the Persian ladies. Without exception they are dark-leaden blue in colour. He would not have any reason to express disapprobation of *chaussure à la Française*. He would find, in the Persian capital, the ugliest of Asiatic shoes. In the bazaar, so far as outer garments are concerned, a lady of quality is indistinguishable from the humblest of the three or four handmaidens who walk behind her. She is also frequently accompanied by a couple of ugly-looking black or white men, whose general physiognomy bespeaks their qualifications. The women of the humbler classes are generally quite alone. Sometimes one meets a white ass as big as an ordinary horse, mounted by a man-servant having before him on the saddle some child of a person of position. The ass is caparisoned like a bull dedicated to Jupiter Capitolinus, and everybody is expected to make way for him. All through the bazaar there is a general rush. Every person seems bent on getting to his destination in the shortest possible time. How unlike the stately long-robed Oriental of our early imaginings! Sometimes a whole flight of diminutive grey asses comes charging through the narrow thoroughfares, laden with bricks and tiles scarcely cold, and rushing on as if the man who screams and yells incontinently behind them were Shaitan in person. Occasionally the foot passengers are obliged to take refuge within the pre-

cincts of the lateral shops, as a mule or gigantic ass, laden on each side with enormous bundles of hay, comes trotting through, filling up the passage; and sometimes a train of sardonically smiling camels stalk past, appropriating all the road to themselves.

Teheran, with its telegraphs and police, its M. Schindler and Count de Monteforte, is no longer the remote Eastern capital that Marco Polo might have hinted at, or some stray adventurous traveller have mentioned in his *impressions de voyage*. There may be holes two feet square in the thoroughfares which flank the King's palace, and at the bottom of which, at unknown depths, run hidden watercourses; there may be rumours afloat that the half-dozen thieves who stole the Shah's regalia from the old man who was conveying them to the jeweller are to be blown from the mouths of the guns in the main square (for which civilised form of punishment the King might claim a well-known precedent); but, practically speaking, Teheran, with its Italian police, its Austrian-trained soldiery, its Russian-taught Cossacks, its macadamised thoroughfares, its electric light, and its two *cafés*, has ceased to belong to the realms of romance.

While staying in the capital I had an opportunity of seeing the Shah proceed in state to visit his First Minister. This functionary combines in himself the offices of Minister for Foreign Affairs and for War; but he is, in reality, Prime Minister. Formerly, indeed, he bore that designation. As he was, however, instrumental in causing Baron Reuter's contract with regard to the Persian railways and mines to be accepted, a powerful coalition of the Court party was formed against him, and the Shah was compelled to dismiss him from authority. Another Minister of the same mental calibre, and equally pleasing to the chief of the State, apparently could not be found, and Hussein Khan was

accordingly placed in his old position, and made Premier in all but name, no one, even nominally, holding that title. Though daily in contact with his Minister, the Shah annually pays him three public visits, to do him honour, the entire royal household, as well as the Sovereign, being entertained at dinner.

From the door of the house where the Shah was staying to the mansion of the Minister, a distance of over a mile, the thoroughfare was lined with troops. Though these soldiers had taken up their position at six in the morning, the Shah did not appear until nearly twelve o'clock. About half-past eleven, sundry old-fashioned carriages, drawn by a pair of horses each, and driven by nondescript-looking coachmen, who to all appearance might have been royal scullions in undisguised professional costume, were seen moving outside the ranks of the troops, in the direction of the Minister's residence. These vehicles contained some of the principal harem favourites, and were preceded by a crowd of men in ordinary Persian civilian costume, beating the air and the ground with long ozier rods, and vociferating to the bystanders to 'be blind' and to turn their faces to the wall, lest by any ill-luck they might catch sight of any of the 'lights of the harem.' The arrival of the monarch was heralded by a number of mounted policemen, who dashed along the ranks in an altogether unnecessarily impetuous manner. These police, organised by the Count de Monteforte, an Italian officer, who had arrived at Teheran two years previously, and who, I understand, had formerly been chief of police in the service of the ex-King of Naples, are very creditably got up, and seem very efficient in maintaining order in the capital. They wear black tunics, with violet facings on collars and cuffs, and a stripe of the same colour down the dark trousers. A small black cylindrical shako and long boots complete the costume.

The foot police carry short sabres made on a European model, those of the mounted men being longer. After the police came thirty horsemen bearing large silver maces; and, behind these, about a hundred others armed with sabres and having double-barrelled fowling-pieces and old-fashioned Persian muskets slung at their backs. All these people were dressed very plainly in sombre-coloured civilian costumes. To these succeeded some fifty oddly-costumed persons, proceeding at a trot on either side of the way. They were the King's running footmen. When I first saw these royal acolytes, I took them to be street mountebanks. Half-a-dozen were sitting down on the kerbstone near the royal gate. Knowing that in the East such people always seek out Europeans as victims, I hastily went round a corner, lest one of them should stand on his head for my benefit. Each of them wore a rather long-skirted red tunic, ornamented with a few scraps of gold lace sewn horizontally on the breast; a pair of dark knee-breeches, white cotton stockings, and shoes with buckles and rosettes. The oddest part of the costume was the hat. It was of black glazed leather, and something like a fireman's helmet developing into a lancer's casque, or the head-dress worn by the eccentric pencil-merchant in Paris some years ago, who drove about the streets in a carriage selling his wares. From the centre and forward and rear ends of the tall, straight crest, rise three bunches of red artificial flowers, made to resemble sweet-william blossoms. These are fixed on long stems, the centre one being the tallest, and all three nodding comically with every movement of the head of the wearer. When the Shah appears in public, he is invariably accompanied by these attendants, who run in front of, behind, and on either side of his horse or carriage. In the midst of them rode a group of forty or fifty of the highest dignitaries of the State, including the First Minister

and the Commander-in-Chief of the army—the Hessem el Seltaneh, or 'Sword of the Kingdom.' All these functionaries were dressed very plainly. At their head rode the Shah himself, if possible more plainly attired than the other members of the group. Had it not been for the crimson umbrella which he carried open above his head, I should have been unable to distinguish him. As I saw him, he appeared a much younger and handsomer man than his photograph would lead one to believe. Perhaps this was the result of the glow cast by the red umbrella. Behind him came an immense concourse of horsemen, presumably belonging to the royal household, followed by the closed carriage which I have already described as resembling the Lord Mayor's coach, resplendent with plate-glass and battered gilding. Next came some led horses, splendidly caparisoned; and a body of police closed the procession, the oddest part of which consisted of the apes and baboons led along by their keepers, and intended to amuse the ladies of the harem. A new feature—new for Persia, that is—was introduced into the scene; viz. the scattering of flowers along the roadway in front of the Shah. One would have expected that children, or at least some tolerably good-looking persons, would have performed this graceful act. Instead, there were two ugly old men, whose ordinary avocation was to throw water from the leather bags which they carried on their backs in order to allay the dust when the Shah passed, and who, having first performed the more useful portions of their duties, were now hurrying about with articles resembling wooden coal-scuttles under their arms, scattering in a very business-like and unpoetical manner what looked like the sweepings of a nursery garden. His Majesty certainly enjoyed whatever physical advantage might accrue from walking over vegetable matter. The allegorical element of the ceremony was decidedly in abeyance.

I have only to add a few concluding remarks about Teheran. The attempt to engraft European modes and procedures in the heart of a thoroughly Asiatic people promises well. The Shah has certainly done his best in the face of the accumulated inertia of centuries, but even his nominally unlimited authority has occasionally to recoil before the prejudices of a people. Still, it is to be hoped that, surrounded as the nation is by nineteenth-century progress, something will in the end be done. Every nation has its own self-conceit, and is apt to consider itself as at bottom the best. It is only an embodiment of the individual. The Persian says: 'The Arabic is the best language' (even though it was Omar who first introduced it at the point of the sword); 'it is a science to know the Turkish language' (this is an indirect tribute to the prowess of the Turk in the past); 'the Persian tongue is like music; all the rest are as the bray of an ass.' A young Persian officer, one of those modelled on the new Austrian system, and who spoke English and French very fairly, was complaining to me that the Shah had given orders relative to the summer encampment of the troops, in which each subaltern was limited to one servant. I ventured to remark that I had recently been in the Russian camp at Tchikislar and along the line of the Atterek, and that each subaltern officer was quite content with one servant. 'Oh,' said he, 'that is a different matter; we, the Persian officers, are gentlemen!'

I have already explained how I was from time to time foiled in all my efforts to accompany the march of the Russian expeditionary force. When Tergukasoff, who succeeded to the command on the death of the brave old Lazareff, arrived, I was allowed to go to the front once more, but no further than Chatte. There I met the retiring columns, and was invited to accompany them to Tchikislar.

I need scarcely say that under the circumstances an 'invitation' was little less than a command. I accepted it, and was on my arrival at the Caspian seaboard 'invited' to go further west. The circumstances of my refusal to proceed any further in the required direction, and of my journey across the Atterek delta to Asterabad, will be in the recollection of the reader. I knew that, sooner or later, an outward movement would be made by the Russian troops; and, while always cherishing the hope that I should be re-admitted to the camp, I thought well to take precautions, in order to be in a position to see the fighting from another side, if still refused by the Czar's generals. On arriving at Teheran I was courteously invited to stay at the British Legation. I called upon Mr. Zinovieff, the Russian Minister, whom I had met at Krasnavodsk, at a ball given by General Lomakin, then the governor of that garrison, and afterwards commander in the ill-starred combat of Geok Tepé. I told him that I had been obliged to quit Tchikislar, and that on two subsequent occasions, when I ventured to return, I had again been summarily compelled to leave. I enquired whether he could use any influence in favour of my being allowed to rejoin the camp. He replied that the matter remained in the hands of the new commander-in-chief, General Skobeleff, and advised me to apply to that officer. I immediately despatched the following telegram: 'Son Excellence le Général Skobeleff, à Baku. —Voulez-vous me permettre accompagner l'expédition de Tchikislar comme Correspondant du "Daily News" de Londres?' In two days I received a reply: 'O'Donovan, Teheran.—Ayant les ordres les plus positifs de ne pas permettre à aucun correspondant, ni Russe, ni étranger, d'accompagner l'expédition, il m'est à mon grand regret impossible d'obtempérer à votre demande.—SKOBELEFF.' This reply, dated from Krasnavodsk, was of course decisive, and

led me to believe that the Russian Minister was mistaken when he said that the matter rested entirely in the hands of the general commanding the expedition. I telegraphed to Skobeleff thanking him for the courteous promptitude of his answer, concluding my message with the words 'Au revoir à Merv,' as I was resolved, if possible, to be there before the Russian troops could reach it. I then took measures to facilitate my journey to some point on the north-eastern frontier of Persia, from whence I could gain the Akhal Tekké region and Merv. I applied to his Highness Hussein Khan Sipah Salar Aazem, the acting Grand Vizier, for permission to go along the frontier, and if necessary to penetrate into the country of the Akhal Tekké Turcomans. I received a most courteous reply, to the effect that the minister was most willing to give me the necessary pass, but that he could not guarantee my personal safety outside the Persian dominions. As I had not asked him to do this latter, I thought that his courtesy savoured of superfluity. He wound up by saying, 'Although you have been for a long time in Persia, and several days at Teheran, I have not yet had the pleasure of receiving a visit from you.' I was satisfied to take the hint as an invitation to visit his Highness, and went accordingly.

After a lengthened progress over ill-set pavements, and between high scorching walls of unbaked brick (*i.e.* mud), I arrived at an enclosure, amid which, high-reared, stood an unshapely mass of buildings with high gables. Broad bands of blue enamelled tiles stretched across the front; otherwise, and excepting the gates, it had no more pretence to architecture than any other building in Teheran. There were crowds of what we should term 'hangers-on' within the yard, to which a broken-down arch gave admittance. They seemed annoyed by my arrival, and evidently thought me a needless addition to their number, until M. le Baron

Norman, the most courteous and courtier-like of secretaries, coming to meet me, ushered me into a vast hall, spread with rich Persian carpets. It was divided into two parts by a couple of steps reaching along its whole breadth. In the lower half was a large tank of water some fifteen feet by twelve. In a few minutes I was seated at a small table vis-à-vis with the person whom ordinary rumour, native as well as European, indicated as the ablest man in Persia. Previously to his accession to his high dignity, he had been ambassador at Constantinople and other Courts, and had accompanied the Shah during his two visits to Europe. He received me most affably. He merely pointed out the great difficulties and dangers of such an emprise as I proposed to take upon myself. He said that the Turcomans of the Akhal Tekké and Merv were no better than they should be. I made allusion to the delegates from Merv still resident at Teheran—delegates who had come to ask the Shah to admit their compatriots as Persian subjects, so that they might thus have some appeal against Russian invasion. He said there was but little hope of their prayer being heard. 'The Akhal Tekké and Merv Turcomans have so often entered into arrangements with us, and have so often broken them, that we can place no reliance on what they say.' 'Then,' I remarked, 'I suppose the Tekkés are abandoned to Russia, as far as Persia goes?' 'Not that exactly,' he said; 'we shall of course always try to do something.' He then spoke about my private affairs. He was willing to give me the necessary safeguard up to the frontiers of Persia. Where these frontiers were he could not exactly define; and he referred me to the British Minister for details on the subject. This was rather comical, for Persia had always laid claim to Merv as one of its dependencies. There was no fixed frontier except the line of the Atterek, from its mouth up to Chatte, and for a short distance beyond

that post along the Sumbar river. All the rest was matter for speculation. Now, of course, there is a definite frontier along the ridges of the Kopet Dagh, but even this merges into the customary vagueness at its eastern extremity. I had always been of opinion that the Atterek frontier required accurate definition, in order to avoid its being made a source of endless trouble. My general impression, when I left the presence of the Sipah Salar, apart from that resulting from experience gained elsewhere, was that Persia was in no wise jealous of Russian intrusion into the southern independent Khanates, even if she were not quite favourable to such a movement.

Being, then, on the point of undertaking what would seem to most people the very hare-brained mission of visiting the Tekkés *chez eux*, the perils attendant on which seemed altogether out of proportion to the avowed object, and as many, in spite of my assurance to the contrary, insisted on attributing to it a political significance, I was obliged, repeatedly, to explain at length the circumstances which had led up to my determination. Shortly after my interview with the Russian Minister, a gentleman whom I had formerly known in connection with the Russian expedition—a Montenegrin, who, according to all accounts, had conducted himself most bravely in the affair at Geok Tepé—called on me at the British Legation, and told me that the Russian Minister had stated to him that my going among the Merv Turcomans as the correspondent of the 'Daily News' was only a pretence, and that, in reality, I was an agent of the British Government, going to encourage the Turcomans, if not with actual assistance in the shape of funds, at least by my presence. Through the person who conveyed to me this intelligence, as well as through Colonel Demontovitch of the Persian Cossacks, I begged to assure the Russian Minister that he was mistaken, and that my errand was

purely and simply that which I had the honour to announce to him. Occasionally, when it is convenient to believe a certain thing, it is difficult to disabuse the minds of interested parties. Should these lines meet the eyes of any Russian Government officials, they will understand that the reason I threw in my lot with the Turcomans was, that the Czar's generals had, so to speak, shut the door in my face, and that I proceeded to my new destination only as a newspaper correspondent, and as neither more nor less of a combatant than I was when I had the honour to be the recipient of Russian hospitality. While regretting that I could not be present to witness the achievements of the Russian soldiers during the then impending campaign, I consoled myself with the hope that I should witness fighting in Central Asia from an unaccustomed standpoint. I hoped that these explanations, which I gave at Teheran to all parties concerned, would secure me in the future from the inuendoes and hints to which my ear had for a considerable time been accustomed.

I duly received from the Sipah Salar the written permission for which I had applied, and which purported to enable me to visit the extreme north-eastern limits of the Persian dominions. Dr. Tholozan, the Shah's physician, also gave me a letter of introduction to an influential border chieftain, the Emir Hussein Khan, governor of Kuchan, so that I was quite hopeful of successfully carrying out my intentions.

At this time the military situation was as follows:— Since the then recent death of Noor Berdi Khan, the recognised chief of the Tekké Turcomans, no other leader of similar influence seemed to have come to the surface. One of his sons was reported to have assumed the leadership; but we had yet to learn his capability for the difficult position the duties of which he had undertaken. Some there were who prophesied a general breaking-up of the

entire Tekké coalition, and a speedy submission to Russian rule, now that the man who had been the life and soul of the movement was no more. This, however, was open to question. The Tekkés had been from time immemorial governed by a *medjlis*, or council, of chiefs and elders; never at any time by emirs or sovereigns, like those of Khiva, Bokhara, &c. The governing element, at the moment, it was only natural to believe, was quite as equal to its mission as formerly, and it was not at all impossible, or even unlikely, that circumstances would push to the front some one of the many competent leaders who of a necessity should exist in the ranks of such a universally warlike people. We had just heard that a general retrograde movement of the Turcomans in the north-western portion of the oasis had taken place; those occupying Bami and Beurma, and other positions of the same kind, having retreated further eastward. About the same date in the previous year a similar movement was made, which proved to be one of concentration on Geok Tepé, or Yengi Sheher, as it is more properly designated—a piece of strategy which ended in the signal defeat of the Russian attacking column. The movement which had just been made I judged to be in all likelihood of a similar nature; and I thought at the time that it might also have something to do with the rumoured advent of a Russian column from the direction of Khiva.

The heat was beginning to be intense, and, eager though I was to be present at the scene of conflict, I looked forward with but little pleasure to the long march which awaited me before I could reach the desired ground.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### TEHERAN TO AGHIVAN.

Preparing for a journey—Mr. Arnold's servant—Posting in Persia—'Towers of Silence'—Evan Keif—Old police-stations—Kishlak—Mud architecture—*Shab-ges*—A tough fowl—Gratuities—Outlying telegraph station—Deep-cut stream beds—Irrigation—Fortified mounds—An old palace—Persian graves—Gathering the harvest—A useful custom—Benevolent lying—Deh Memek—Towers of refuge—Terrace irrigation—Castled mound of Lasgird—Lugubrious quarters—Pursued by the mail—An adventure with Afghans—A precipitate flight—Semnan—Extensive cemeteries—A quick ride to Aghivan.

PROVIDED with the Sipah Salar Aazem's pass, and Dr. Tholozan's letter of introduction, I set about making my final preparations for journeying eastward towards the long looked-for goal. I was assured on every side that the Russians intended to move as early as possible, and it was more than once hinted that I should probably be too late upon the ground to witness the closing operations of the campaign. I was further informed that, in view of the death of Noor Berdi Khan, the Tekkés would not attempt to offer any resistance to the invading force, and that a visit to the scene of action would involve a certain amount of misspent energy and time. Had I been less resolved than I was upon penetrating into the Turcoman region, the discouragement I met with would have been more than sufficient to induce me to abandon the enterprise upon which I had set my mind. However, I said to myself, 'I will do my best, and, if I fail, so much the worse.' I telegraphed to my servant at Asterabad, instructing him to start immediately

for Shahrood, and to meet me at that place with my horses and baggage, which I had left behind me on starting for Teheran. I next hired, at Teheran, a Persian servant, whose credentials included some strong recommendations from former English travellers, among them being one from Mr. Arnold, who has written a detailed account of his journey from Resht to the Persian Gulf. The sequel will show how very little he deserved the good character given to him.

Having procured the necessary order for post-horses, in the afternoon of June 6, 1880, I rode out of Gulahec, the summer residence of the Persian Minister, and bent my course towards Teheran, some eight miles distant, and through which lay my road eastward. I was so much delayed in the bazaar making some purchases necessary for my journey that it was nearly sunrise on the following morning before I was able to start on my road to the borders of the Tekké country. There were regular relays of post-horses along the entire road as far as Meshed. The stations at which fresh horses are procurable are from six to eight *farsakhs* (twenty-four to thirty-two miles) apart, and the amount charged is one *kran* (franc) per *farsakh* for each horse. One is also obliged to pay at the same rate for the horse of the post courier who accompanies him. One is allowed to travel continuously; day and night if he be equal to it; and the ground could be got over rapidly enough were horses always forthcoming at the stations, and were they always in proper condition for the road. There are eleven stations between Teheran and Shahrood, the entire distance being seventy *farsakhs*, or two hundred and eighty-four miles.

Leaving Teheran, the traveller rides in a south-easterly direction across an arid, stony plain, interspersed here and there with gardens and ruined mud buildings, and traversed

by numerous tiny irrigation canals, offshoots of the various *kanots* or underground passages leading from the girding hills. Five or six miles from the town the road ascends gently, and passes through a bare, rocky gorge. To the right are the 'towers of silence'—the burying-places of the Guebres or Fire Worshippers, very many of whom are to be found at Teheran. All the gardeners employed in the gardens of the British Legation belong to this sect. The 'towers of silence' consist of some low circular stone buildings, having at the top an iron grating. The dead bodies are laid on this grating, where they either decompose gradually or are devoured by birds of prey, the bones ultimately dropping through the grating into a cavity within the tower. The road next enters a vast plain, studded at long intervals with small wooded gardens enclosed within tall mud walls flanked by circular towers. Within each of these series of walls are the few flat-topped mud houses which constitute a Persian village. Between these little blooming oases the ground is waste and barren, all the more repulsively so in contrast with such tantalising spots of verdure. With an adequate water supply vast districts, now hopelessly drear and desert, might be covered with wood and pasture. Some thirty miles from Teheran is a large caravanserai of brick and stone, near which are the extensive ruins of old buildings of unbaked brick. A pretty considerable stream crosses the plain, to lose itself, like similar watercourses here, in the burning waste of the vast salt desert beyond. Scattered along its banks were the black, low tents of a small encampment of nomads—probably Kurds.

We changed horses at a place called Evan Keif, a miserable, burnt-up kind of village, like all places, great or small, along this route, which are composed of square-topped mud houses. A little further on is a vast expanse

of water-tossed boulders and rounded pebbles—across which the floods formed by the melting snows of the Elburz find their way to the salt desert. By various dams and embankments the water was divided into at least forty different channels, some filled by deep and rapid torrents by no means easy to cross. The postman pointed out a spot, near which we forded one of these streams, where some travellers had been swept away and drowned a short time previously. To this many-branched stream succeeds a high stony plateau seamed by the huge, deep beds of ancient streams, and then the road begins to mount the slopes of an outlying mountain spur. In the plain the heat was excessive, but here, on the rising ground, a rather cold wind blew, and soon we got into the midst of a very disagreeable fog, while smart light showers fell occasionally. Another hour's riding brought us to the entrance of a rocky gorge running between tall cliffs of gypsum and ferruginous rock. The entrance had formerly been guarded by a stone fort, a *Karaoul hané*, or police post, now completely in ruins, and further on were the remains of what must have been an important stronghold, evidently of very ancient date. In fact, from this point forward, at every two or three miles, we came upon the remains of posts formerly established to prevent the incursions of the Turcomans by this convenient mountain pass, which is about twelve miles in length, and traversed by a stream, whose waters are, however, rather unpalatable, owing to the amount of decomposed gypsum which they contain. The pass suddenly widens out at its eastern end, and debouches on a vast plain, the hills to the southward retiring so much as shortly to be only faintly visible on the horizon in that direction. The plain is very well watered, and the villages are numerous and large—all of them well defended by mud ramparts and towers. So numerous were the irrigation streams that

they rendered travelling on horseback exceedingly disagreeable, especially as, the corn being then ripe, the water no longer required for the fields is turned at random into the plain, forming morasses and mud holes, which extend far and wide, and often render considerable détours necessary. It was just sunset as we galloped into Kishlak, our resting-place for the night, having made exactly eighty miles since morning—not a bad journey considering the nature and condition of the road.

Within the walls of this considerable village the eye is struck by the variety and fantastic style of the mud edifices. The villagers seemed to be of an architectural turn of mind, and, notwithstanding the unfavourable nature of the available material, had taken a great deal of trouble in designing and executing the various cupola tombs, the arched doorways of mosques, and the odd-looking covers which protected the numerous water cisterns from the sun's rays. These latter were pyramidal structures, twenty-five feet in height, and broken on the outside into steps, twenty inches wide and high, the apex surmounted by a not ungraceful four-pillared kiosk. In the rays of the setting sun, these structures of unbaked brick, plastered over with fine, whitish yellow loam, gave one the idea of buildings sculptured from single masses of amber-tinted marble. The *chappar hané*, or post-house, was a kind of citadel in itself; as were, indeed, most of the buildings. It was surrounded by a wall twenty feet high, the roofs of the stables within constituting the ramp of the loopholed parapet. At each corner was a projecting bartizan, by which the defenders would be enabled to flank the walls and fire at assailants close to its foot. Access was given to the place through an arched entrance, closed by stout doors five inches thick, and barred with iron. Above the arch was a square-topped room known as the *bala hané*, which served as quarters for

the better class of travellers, as well as a kind of watch-tower and look-out station, to be used when the Turcomans were abroad. Here every man's house is his castle, if not in the metaphorical sense, at least thoroughly so in the physical sense, in times of danger.

I have already mentioned the *garrib-gez*, or *shab-gez*, as it is indifferently called (*arga Persica*), the insect which is a terror and often a real danger to strangers travelling in this part of Persia, and which is known as the 'stranger biter,' or 'night biter,' for it does not attack the inhabitants of the places infested by it, and only leaves its hiding-place after dark. I asked the postmaster whether any of these pests were to be found in his establishment, and was informed with cheerful alacrity that they abounded there. I was consequently obliged to take up my quarters on the flat roof of the *bala hané*, which during the day-time is too hot a spot for the 'stranger biters,' and at night too cold for their delicate constitutions. A horse-cloth spread on the roof for a bed, and a saddle for a pillow, was the only sleeping accommodation afforded. I had hoped to be able to write something before lying down to sleep, but the smart evening breeze precluded the possibility of keeping a candle lighted. Accordingly, having jotted down some very brief notes of my day's journey, I ate my supper of fowl and leathery bread, such as one finds throughout the East, and *mast*, or coagulated milk. This was the only food procurable excepting boiled rice, of which I had devoured so much during the preceding twelve months as to be quite willing to dispense with it when any other edibles were available. The *arga Persica* is, it seems, a parasite on all kinds of poultry in this neighbourhood, abounding wherever such are kept, and reducing them to a miserable state of leanness and toughness, as I discovered to my cost while endeavouring to sup off the cartilaginous hen supplied to me, and

which had been hunted down and cooked on the spur of the moment.

An hour before sunrise next morning I was up and away, after having paid a rather considerable bill for the very slender accommodation and limited supper of the preceding night. There were two krans for being allowed to sleep on the top of the house; one-and-a-half for my steel-thewed rooster and bread; and one kran as a gratification to the courier who accompanied me from Teheran; in all three shillings and ninepence—a very considerable sum in such a country. I have remarked that out here people seem not to appreciate the value of money, probably because they see so little of it. They expect in the form of gratuities about six times as much as Europeans. A good deal of this is owing to the fact that inferior officials are but miserably paid, servants occasionally receiving only their food from their employers, and being supposed to indemnify themselves by extracting fees and gratuities on every possible occasion. A local governor wishes to do you honour. He sends you a plate of fruit or sticky sweetmeats, value about sixpence. The servants—for, the greater the number who escort the 'present,' the greater the honour—must receive each his 'anam,' or present, in the shape of a couple of shillings or more, according to the rank of his master. The latter thus has the double advantage of conferring honour on the stranger, and at the same time having his servants paid. This kind of thing obtains from the highest to the lowest spheres, and is at the bottom of a great deal of the demoralisation of Persian society.

The horses supplied to me at Kishlak were, for a wonder, strong, well-conditioned animals, and we got over a good deal of ground, notwithstanding the continual splashing through irrigation canals, and stumbling and floundering in miry holes. An hour's galloping brought us to Aradan,

an extensive village, which seems to enjoy some special importance, as there is here a telegraph bureau, the first to be met with after leaving Teheran. The surrounding district is lavishly supplied with water, and the water-melon is largely cultivated. The ground was divided into patches of about six feet square, around each of which was an irrigation trench. The melons are first planted in a small earth-bank at the edge of this trench, the plants subsequently spreading over the square, which can be inundated at will. The trenches have to be frequently cleared of the fine earth-deposit which speedily collects in them in consequence of the rapidity with which the mountain streams flow in their own channels, carrying with them an enormous amount of earth in suspension, which is deposited as soon as the velocity of the flow is lessened in the comparatively level trenches. So great is the force of the streams in these districts, and so soft and deep the loamy soil, that in some instances they have excavated their vertically-sided channels to a depth of from twenty to twenty-five feet, rendering them, when they are allowed to follow their own beds, quite unavailable for irrigation. To correct this, embankments are constructed higher up, in stony ground, where the stream has not cut into the soil, turning the water slightly, and allowing it to flow into previously prepared irrigation canals. The current, when not required in these canals, is allowed to follow its natural course. In the north of Persia, and notably on the plains north of the Elburz mountains, vast stretches of fertile ground are now barren deserts, the streams which should irrigate them naturally, such as the Atterek and Giurgen, having excavated their channels to too great a depth. It seemed to me that a little engineering skill would render it possible to turn these larger streams, like the smaller ones, at will, and to give back fertility to what is now a howling wilderness.

In the midst of the village of Aradan stands an edifice which at once gives to the traveller the cue to the original use of the mounds which one sees all over this part of the country, and which at intervals occur in great numbers up to the banks of the Atterek. Out in these plains, where there are no natural elevations, it was found necessary for defensive purposes to erect earth-heaps, upon which to rear castles and citadels, especially in districts which, like these, were open to the sudden attacks of the nomads of the desert. The castle of Aradan was the first of the kind which I had seen in a perfect condition and in actual use. The mound is about seventy yards in length by fifty in breadth. Its sides are very nearly vertical, and almost in line with the walls of the fortalice which crowns its summit. The height of the entire structure cannot be less than seventy or eighty feet. The revetment of the mound and the walls of the castle are of unbaked brick, plastered over with fine loam, almost as hard as Roman cement, and of a reddish ochreous hue. The whole thing is a composite structure of square and half-round towers clinging together, and having two irregular tiers of windows and loopholes, seemingly constructed at different dates, without regard to any definite plan or design, and closely resembling some of those mediæval feudal strongholds one sees crowning rock summits in Western Europe. Battlements and bartizans crowd the walls, and between them is caught a view of terraces, arched arcades, and stairs, heaped together in the most incongruous fashion; the entire combination as romantically picturesque as it is possible to imagine. Access is given to the interior by steep stairs within the walls, the entrance being small, and well guarded by towers and outworks. In the base of the mound are cave-like openings, used as stables, and probably also as places of refuge for flocks during a hostile incursion. Within sight of Aradan

are several similar structures scattered over the plain, some of them quite perfect; others half ruined, but still inhabited; and others, again, fallen into complete decay, a few crumbling walls only remaining to show that a fortification once crowned the mound whose sides, formerly vertical, had assumed a slope of forty-five degrees, partly from atmospheric influences, and partly through the accumulation of the wall materials along their base. All of them, however, stand in the midst of large and populous villages, and clearly indicate the nature of the grass-grown earth heaps that one constantly meets with, standing mournfully alone in the silent, uncultivated wastes, where not a vestige of wall or tower remains to tell either of fortalice or of village. Those mounds which remain along the Atterek and Giurgen were unquestionably erected with the same object as those which I have just described; and their number and extent plainly indicate how populous the now vast, grim solitudes of the Turcoman deserts once were. That every vestige of village and fort should have disappeared proves that in remote times both were constructed of mud or unbaked brick, as in Persia to-day. It is only on those of very large size, and occurring in the irregular line which reaches from Gumush Tepé to Budjnoord, that remnants of the ancient works known as 'Alexander's Wall' are to be found, in the shape of the large heavy burnt bricks which strew their bases or mark the track of the ancient ramparts. I stayed but a few minutes at Aradan to observe its castellated mound, and, regretting that time did not allow me to make any sketches, rode away on my eastward journey.

Immediately outside the ramparts which enclose the village are a large number of cupola-covered cisterns and *imam zadés*, or domed tombs, all of yellow earth, the tombs almost indistinguishable from the cisterns. Round these monuments, which are the places of sepulture of very holy

persons, are whole acres of graves of ordinary believers, interred in as close propinquity as possible to the hallowed precincts. These graves consist simply of a brick-lined cavity, measuring six feet by two, and some three feet deep, in which the body is laid, apparently without any coffin, the whole being covered over by a very slightly-arched covering of earth, in form and colour closely resembling pie crust. Within this closed cell the body moulders away. When rain and the feet of passers-by have worn these earth crusts thin, it is exceedingly dangerous to ride over one of the spaces set out with this kind of ghastly pastry. The horse continually breaks through, plunging his hoofs into the space below, to the imminent peril of his own legs and his rider's neck. During an hour's ride we passed close by no less than three castle-crowned mounds, and across numbers of irrigation trenches. The harvest was being gathered in; and to judge from the large crowd of persons of both sexes, and of mules and asses collected in one or two fields at a time, I came to the conclusion that as each person's corn became fit for the sickle the entire population of the neighbourhood assembled to lend their aid in reaping it and carrying it home.

Soon the nature of the ground changed, and we were tearing along over a most disagreeable track, sharp rock ledges projecting into the roadway, which was also thickly strewn with rounded stones varying in size between an egg and a man's head. Amidst this occurred miry holes and half-dry watercourses. I fancied that at each bound of my horse he and I must certainly come to grief, and I sat well thrown back in the saddle, prepared for the apparently inevitable çatastrophe. We passed small groups of pilgrims, some mounted on donkeys, others toiling along on foot, returning from the shrine at Meshed; and I discovered the solution of a matter which had often puzzled me. Along

these routes one frequently sees large heaps of stones collected on either side of the way, there being no *imam zadé* or other shrine in sight out of respect for which the stones might have been accumulated. I now found that when a troop of pilgrims, going to or returning from a shrine, came in sight of their halting-place for the night, each one was by custom obliged to pick up a stone or two, and add them to the heap nearest him. I do not know how this custom originated. If every pious usage of the kind were equally practical in its results, the more of them there existed the better. This to which I now allude has done much towards rendering the roads tolerably free from stones at the favoured places. For this reason it is to be regretted that pilgrimages are not more frequent along other routes in Persia which I could mention. Once off the abominably rocky, boulder-strewn stretch of ground, we got on fast enough. In a few minutes we were rushing past a couple of stone-built tower-flanked caravanserais, wrecked by the Turcomans years ago, and, true to Persian custom, never repaired since. A group of weary-looking old men, pilgrims from Meshed, were slaking their thirst at a ruined tank close by. With their long blue calico gowns, so long that they could scarce avoid treading on them as they walked, they had the appearance of people who would be a great deal the better for following scriptural advice anent girding up loins for a journey. With faint voice one inquired how many *farsakhs* it was to the next *menzil*, and was informed with the best-intentioned mendacity in the world by our courier that it was but one *farsakh* off, though, having just come over the ground, I knew that it was at least four times that distance. In twenty minutes more we had reached the postal station of Deh Memek, having, without changing horses, done twenty-eight miles, over very bad ground, in a little less than three hours and a half. At this station we were informed that

the post from Teheran was due there that evening, and that we had better lose no time, as if overtaken, we should find continually ahead of us the fatigued horses of the couriers. There was another danger, too, that of being crossed by the up mail from Meshed, which would leave us in an equally awkward predicament, as the horses at each station are seldom more numerous than is absolutely necessary for the postal service. While waiting for the horses to be saddled, I jotted down my notes of the road.

Scattered over the surrounding country were mud towers, ten to twelve feet high and seven or eight in diameter, loopholed, and having very small doorways. These towers were from one hundred to three hundred yards apart, and were intended as places of refuge for the people working in the fields, in case of a sudden incursion of Turcomans. Here, every one goes to work with musket at back; and three or four men in one of these towers could easily hold out, even against a large force, until aid arrived from the neighbouring villages or *karaoul hanés*. The ground, sloping gently away from the distant hills, was broken into hundreds of terraces, their greatest length being parallel to the line of hills. By this arrangement a single stream was made to irrigate a great extent of ground, the water, after flowing over the upper terrace, descending to the next, and so on to the lowermost. Deh Memek itself is a wretched place, with colossal mud caravanserais all in a semi-ruinous condition. We were again fortunate as regards horses, the animals being quite fresh, having had an entire week's repose. This was lucky, for the next stage was eight *farsakhs* distant. The ground was much the same as before, save that, owing to the streams having cut their beds to an excessive depth, and to their cañon-like channels being almost subterranean, the country was entirely barren. Four hours' quick riding brought us to a narrow valley in

which flowed a pretty large stream. Traversing this, we crossed a chain of low, bare hills composed entirely of gypsum, and, passing through a narrow cleft which allowed but one horseman abreast, reached a large, circular, well-cultivated plain. In the midst of this stood the considerable village of Lasgird. In its centre is a castled mound of large dimensions, such as I have already described, but the village itself is not fortified. On the western skirt of the place is an extensive cemetery, containing many large *imam zadés* and lesser domed tombs. Passing by one of these, I was surprised to see lying around it a number of reposing camels, their burdens scattered about on the ground, and, within the tomb itself, in the vaulted chamber under the cupola, a couple of women, evidently of the better class, accompanied by three or four children. They had arranged their carpets and beds there, and were making themselves apparently as much at home in their somewhat lugubrious quarters as the most select party of ghouls or vampires could have done. I recollect once, in my youthful days, reading in the 'Arabian Nights' of a traveller who, arriving late in the evening at some unknown town, and finding the gates closed, took up his quarters for the night in a tomb near the city gate. I wondered very much what kind of a tomb it could be within which he could find lodging, my experience of such monuments up to that time being confined to flat stone slabs or tall obelisks; and, moreover, I felt surprised that the traveller did not feel any of the apprehension which I should then certainly have felt of uncanny nocturnal visitors. I have often remarked in the East, and notably in Persia, the total absence of dislike to the propinquity of a cemetery after dark which is so common in Europe. I have frequently seen shepherds camping at night with their flocks among tombs, and have sometimes been almost startled into my early belief in bogies

by seeing a tall cloaked figure rise suddenly among the graves, as some tired traveller put himself on the alert, lest I might be what he dreaded much more than any hobgoblin or *div*, viz. a prowling Turcoman.

Having the fear of the pursuing postman before my eyes, I stayed but a few minutes at Lasgird, and then sped away once more, this time amid fields of ripe corn, where the harvestmen were busy. Half a dozen miles out, while riding along a narrow winding path between some sand-hills, I met with a somewhat startling adventure. Rounding the shoulder of a hill, I came suddenly face to face with a mounted Afghan trooper, in full uniform, and armed to the teeth. He wore a dark-coloured turban, one end of the cloth pulled up in front, so as to resemble a small cockade. His uniform was blue-black, and he wore long boots. A broad black leather cross-belt, with two very large brass buckles, crossed his breast. He had sabre, pistols, and carbine. He looked sharply at me as he passed, and immediately halted and entered into conversation with my servant, who rode behind. Next moment another horseman appeared, also an Afghan, thoroughly armed, and whose dress indicated that he was of high rank. He, too took a good look at me, and, like the trooper, stopped to talk with my servant. Twenty yards behind him rode four more troopers, each one leading a laden baggage horse. As I passed these I turned round, and saw the entire six halted together and looking after me. The postman was terribly alarmed. He took the new comers for Turcomans. My servant came up, and I learned from him that the Afghans had been enquiring who I was, and whither I was going. He had informed them of my nationality, and that I was bound for Meshed—for what purpose he could not say. My impression was that they, having learned what countryman I was, were deliberating about attacking me, and,

being now hidden from their view, I put spurs to my horse and dashed away at a headlong pace over the plain in the direction of a village some miles off. I hoped there to be able to get some aid, or at least to be able to use my revolver with greater effect from under cover of the loopholed wall. The ground was undulating, so that I could not see whether or not I was pursued until I reached the village. Arrived there, I swept the plain with my field-glass, and, to my intense relief, found that my apprehensions had been groundless. My servant informed me that the chief was named Nadir Khan, and that one of the troopers told him they had come from some town, whose name he could not recollect, through Herat, and that they were now on their way to Teheran. I continued my way, heartily glad of having come safely out of what might have been a very ugly scrape.

As one approaches the village, or rather town, of Semnan, the country is very fertile and cultivated, villages occurring all around at short intervals. The cupolas and towers of Semnan look remarkably beautiful, their bright yellow tints gleaming amid the verdant groves of pomegranate, willow, fig, and plane-tree. 'A wilderness of graves and tombs' stretches around the city walls, and fills every available space within them. Each garden is a fortress in itself, the doors giving admission to it being barely two feet square, and closed by thick stone slabs turning on pivots. The house doors, too, were scarcely four feet high, very solid, and the locks invariably on the inside. There was no exterior keyhole; but instead, close by the jamb and level with the lock, a hole six or eight inches in diameter was pierced in the earthen wall, which penetrated to half the thickness of the latter, then turning at right angles and opening in the midst of its edge. Through this the arm can be introduced and the key

applied to the lock. This arrangement rendered the picking of the lock impossible, or nearly so; and besides, prevented its being removed or damaged as easily as if it were outside. This opening in the wall allows of a person within conversing with one outside, without being seen or fired at. This arrangement, which I have since frequently noticed in other parts of the East, would serve to explain the Scriptural quotation (Song of Sol. v. 4), 'My beloved put in his hand by the hole *of the door*, and my bowels were moved for him.' The town walls are in some places beautifully decorated with blue and red tiles of the most brilliant hues. The mosque, with its tall, slender minaret, is the only building of burned brick in the place. There is a pretty large covered bazaar, and the remnant of a large and once beautiful palatial residence, built on the top of a huge artificial mound in the midst of the town.

At Semnan I was informed that, unless I consented to go on at once, the horses would be retained for the expected courier; so, tired as I was, I had to set off on another stage of twenty-four miles. I reached Aghivan, a solitary caravanserai in the midst of desolate mountains, just as the sun was setting, and in a very brief space of time was sleeping soundly after my rapid journey of one hundred and eight miles since four o'clock that morning. Four stages—twenty-three *farsakhs*—had still to be traversed before I could gain Shahrood.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### SHAHROOD.

Caravanserais—Villages and their fortifications—Kanots and tanks—Absence of palm, orange, and olive trees—Minars—Deh Mullah—Crossed by the post—Persian postmaster—A storm on the plain—Shahrood—Derivation of name—Armenian traders—Bitten by the *garrib-gez*—Various cures—Disputes about sluices—Monthly pilgrim caravans—Dervishes—Military escort—Bokharan pilgrims—Change of plans.

Aghivan is situated amongst stony hills, and wears a most dreary appearance. It is not a village, for the country around affords nothing that could support even the smallest hamlet, but merely consists of a caravanserai, *imam zadé*, and a post-house. The caravanserai is of extremely ancient architecture and of great extent, with a sort of hospice for pilgrims attached. The post-house is a comparatively modern structure. These establishments have been erected along the Teheran-Meshed route at different times for the use of pilgrims and other travellers. Large caravans of the former pass the place monthly; but, except at these periods, there is little or no sign of life around the desolate station. There is not a single private dwelling near it, and the place usually has an aspect of utter desolation. Gosbek, the next station, is similar in appearance to Aghivan, consisting like it only of a caravanserai and post-house, but it is situated on a plain. The distance between the two stations is about twenty-eight English miles. The first half of the way lies in the hills, and is intolerably rough, but the last fourteen miles are tolerably easy travelling.

From Gosbek to Damkhan, a fertile and well-cultivated plain stretches some twenty-five miles. The whole face of the country is dotted in every direction with towers of refuge, like the peel towers that once existed so numerously in the counties on the Scottish border. The whole plain is filled with fortified villages, situated in general at little more than half a mile or so from one another. Each is surrounded by strong walls, in some places extremely well designed for purposes of resistance, and the low houses within are completely hidden from view by these fortifications. In some cases the walls are triple, the outermost being moreover protected by a deep ditch or wet moat. All the walls are furnished with flanking towers, and, together with the central buildings and gateways, are elaborately ornamented with mouldings, made in the plastic clay of which the whole is built. In fact, the ornamentation is stamped on somewhat in the same way that a pastrycook manipulates pie-crust, and often reminds one of the latter in its appearance.

These earthworks, though strong enough against an enemy's attack, are from the nature of their materials of a very perishable description. Every year's rain does them serious damage, and entails the necessity of immediate repairs. If from any cause these are neglected, a few years suffice to level the entire work. The traveller sees on every hand shapeless earth mounds, which indicate the sites of villages that have once existed. From time immemorial such fortifications have been built here, and these mounds are the only marks left to tell of their former existence. Still, clay walls are quite sufficient protection against the Turcomans, who are the most dreaded enemies of their inhabitants. These marauders never attempt the siege of a fortified place. Their system is to raid on the inhabitants unexpectedly while they are at work in the fields, and to

drive off the camels and flocks before their owners have time to secure them in their fortifications.

Internally, the villages resemble thickets or orchards, so dense are the trees among which the houses are placed. The fig and pomegranate are the most common fruit-trees; the willow and plane tree are also abundant. Water is everywhere in abundance. Subterranean canals, or *kanots*, convey it to every village, and ridges of earth mark the course of these canals across the plain, like gigantic mole-tracks. Of course it would be easy for an enemy to cut these watercourses in case of a siege, and to guard against such an eventuality, numerous large tanks are provided in each village, and kept constantly filled from the *kanots*. Each hamlet has its local chief, who occupies one end; his fortified dwelling usually taking up nearly a third of the space enclosed, and forming a perfect castle, such as they are in Persia. These villages in the plain of Damkhan are not built on artificial mounds as in other districts of Persia, but they are amply protected by the number and strength of their fortifications against any foray the Turcomans can attempt. Indeed, were their defenders armed with modern rifles, and skilled in their use, they could offer a formidable opposition to a regular invading army. Their earthworks are quite strong enough to defy the common field artillery, and the villages stand so close together, and are so connected by the isolated refuge towers, that without regular siege guns an invader would find it hard work to force his way through them.

The Turcoman forays to which I have alluded have grown much rarer than formerly since the advance of the Russians on the Atterek. Only further east, and in the vicinity of the Tekké headquarters, are raids now attempted, and those but rarely. To the Damkhan villagers, consequently, the advent of the Muscovites is by no means dis-

tasteful. They are delighted to be freed from the incursions of their marauding neighbours, and, with Eastern fatalism, they never trouble themselves about ulterior dangers from the approach of the European forces. Accordingly they were eager to supply the Russians with all the provisions they needed, the Shah's orders to the contrary notwithstanding. The high prices paid by the Russian commissaries is an additional attraction to the needy villagers, and Russian gold is an effective agent in reconciling them to the advance of the strangers. The Turcomans themselves are not insensible to the charms of foreign pay. The tribes of Jaffar Bai, and Ata Bai, of Hassan Kouli and the Giurgen, were among the most active partisans of the army on the Atterek, though they are akin to the Tekké themselves.

A strange fact in connection with the botany of this portion of Persia is the absence of several almost typical Eastern trees. Though figs, pomegranates, and the mulberry, both black and white, grow luxuriantly on all sides, the palm, olive, and orange, which one would expect to be equally common, are totally absent. The latter grows and ripens well in much more northern districts, and the olive certainly would be a most desirable addition to the agricultural resources of a people so fond of oily *pilaffs* as the Persians. The palm, too, would flourish here. In the gardens of a deserted palace on the shores of the Caspian there is a fine one growing, which the local traditions say has been there since the time of Shah Abass the Great. The same tradition states that the whole country between Asterabad and the Atterek was once an unbroken forest of palm trees. Now, at least, none are to be seen, and their absence leaves a sense of void in an Oriental landscape where camels and palms would seem to be naturally associated.

Few sights are more charming to the eye than the view

of one of these fortified villages, with its walls topped by a crown of foliage, especially when the traveller approaches it after a long journey across the stony deserts. The hues which they put on in the evening sun are indescribably gorgeous. The clay walls glisten like gold in the slanting rays, and the flowers among the leaves of the trees above glow with gem-like tints till each village rampart with its battlements and towers, and the patches of deep blue sky beyond and between, looks like a mural crown set with rubies and turquoises. The bright colours of the landscape, so different from the cold neutral tints of more northern climates, seem to have an effect on the native eye, and the Persians delight in bright colours as a means of ornament. Even such matter-of-fact buildings as towers and ramparts are often thus decorated. At Teheran and Semnan the towers and walls were adorned with bands of bright blue tiles, almost rivalling the depth of the sky tints themselves.

About ten miles after leaving Damkhan the level of the plain was broken by two objects resembling spires in the far distance. I was almost wearied of guessing at what they might be before I approached near enough to make out their character. They proved to be two lofty *minars*, or minarets, as they are more commonly styled in the West. One of them was close by my road, so that I had an opportunity of examining it with a little attention as I passed. It was plain, and more than twice the height of the *minar* at Semnan, though the latter is much richer in design and more elaborately finished. At base its diameter was about sixteen feet, and it tapered gradually to the top, which was finished by a small projecting cornice. On this a wooden platform had been laid, from which the Imam could call the faithful to prayer; but this was a good deal dilapidated when I saw it. A winding stair, lit by openings in the

sides of the tower itself, gave access to the top. The material throughout, from foundations to top, was baked brick, and about midway up the height was a band inscribed with Kufic characters, moulded rudely in the bricks, and proving the Mahomedan character of the building. I mention this fact chiefly because my servant told me that in the more southerly provinces, as Yezd, there were exactly similar buildings of a date long antecedent to the rise of Mahomedanism. What truth may be in his statement I had no means of ascertaining, but the Damkhan minar is unquestionably Mahomedan. During the archæological discussions on the Irish 'Round Towers,' which excited such attention some forty years ago, much stress was laid on the reported existence of 'fire towers' in Persia similar to the Irish buildings. General Vallancey, in the last century, first called attention to the matter, and argued that the Irish towers were erected by sun worshippers with the same purpose as the Persian towers had been by the Guebres before the advent of Mahomed. The Persian tower which I saw was most certainly a Mahomedan minar, hough the mosque attached, being built of sun-dried bricks, might easily be destroyed, and thus leave the tower standing alone, perhaps to puzzle future generations of archæologists.

Damkhan was the first town arrived at after leaving Semnan, and in fact these two were the only places approaching to the rank of towns along the line I had been following. Like the villages around it, it is girdled with earth walls and towers, within which huge fortified dwellings, often in ruins, and arched bazaars, were flanked by groves of pomegranate and mulberry. I remained there barely half an hour. Dreading that the postal authorities might interfere with my horses, I hurried out of the town, and pushed on at full speed for Deh Mullah, the last station between me

and my destination for the time being, Shahrood. Deh Mullah is twenty-four miles from Damkhan across a dead level plain, dotted with the mounds I have already mentioned as marking the former sites of villages. The day was far advanced and the weather threatening, so I sped across the plain at a rate which made the peasants whom I passed eye me suspiciously. Along the road men were everywhere looking after the corn-fields with muskets in their hands; but this combination of military and agricultural externals is too common here to attract the traveller's notice. Whatever they thought of my pace, they kept their suspicions to themselves, and I arrived in good time at Deh Mullah, but only to find all my hopes of further journey thence frustrated for the time. As I dashed up to the post-house which lies just outside the village gate, what was my disgust to see the gentlemen of the up post from Meshed already mounted on the very animals which I had fondly hoped would carry me straight to Shahrood. It was all to no purpose that I had outstripped the couriers behind me. I could not outrun those who had thus come down on my track from the opposite direction. There was no escape from fate. The post horses which had just made their sixteen miles from Meshed at full speed were in absolute need of a rest before they could start back with me, and my own, which had just come the twenty-four miles from Damkhan at a full gallop, were equally exhausted. I had to make the best of my case, and, while waiting three hours for my steeds, I strolled around the village of Deh Mullah.

Whatever might be my eagerness to get on to my destination, it was evident that the town itself was little concerned about rapidity of progression. All was silent as the grave. The postmaster was seated on an earthen bank under the archway of his establishment, smoking peacefully. He was an old man, tall in stature, and with an

utterly woebegone expression on his face. His beard ought to have been white, but on some peculiar principle, only known to Persian æsthetes, he had dyed it orange red. He was dressed in a loose flowing robe, wore a tall lambskin cap on his shaven head, and his feet were guiltless of stockings. The old gentleman with orange tawny beard seemed to be the only as well as the oldest inhabitant of Deh Mullah, as on looking through the gateway not a person was to be seen. Even bad company is here better than none, so I seated myself on a bank *vis-à-vis* with the melancholy smoker, and commenced to light a *kalioun*. The *kalioun*, or water-pipe, is in shape somewhat like a huge earthen ink jar, in the neck of which a wooden stem is stuck. The stem, which is turned and carved, is about two and a half feet high, surmounted by a brass cone of considerable size. This is filled partially by the tobacco known here as *tumbaki*, and on top of the tobacco pieces of lighted charcoal are placed. A hollow cane runs from the brass cone or grate to the bottom of the jar, and another is attached to its neck, through which the smoker inhales the washed smoke. I pulled away at this apparatus for a while in silence, and then strolled into the bazaar. Not a human being was to be seen anywhere, and the dull grey light made the place look like a city of the dead, such as are told of in Arabian fairy tales. I walked through several streets with the same experience, and finally, getting oppressed and half scared by the utter stillness, I returned hastily to the post-house beyond the gate, where at least the tawny-bearded smoker remained to enliven the scene. He was still smoking impassively, but he was the only living thing in sight, except the lizards that popped their heads up from their holes or scurried across the ground in fright at my tread. The mud fortifications and the flat-roofed houses beyond them were alike 'silent still and silent all.' Even

the appearance of a cat or dog would have been welcome as a break to the dead silence, but none appeared. It was with a sense of deep relief that after three hours I saw the post horses at last appear, after their needed rest. I wasted no time in resuming my journey towards Shahrood, and left Deh Mullah to its death-like repose.

My journey lay across a plain bounded on the left by gloomy mountains, but stretching away in other directions as limitless as an Illinois prairie. The mountains were overhung by ominous-looking dark clouds, through which an occasional rift let a gleam of shifting sunlight on particular spots. When I had travelled a few miles the thunder began to roll, and, turning, I saw the storm taking definite shape on the mountains. In the vast expanse of the horizon, its extent, and I may even say its form, was visible at once, as it moved down in masses of dark cloud, like giant genii from the mountains, and took its course across the plain. Whirling columns of dust preceded the storm-clouds like the vanguard of an army on the march, and at intervals lightnings shot out from the sides of the dark mass like flashes of artillery. I was luckily out of its path, and only felt a few rain-drops, but never had I seen a storm in all its extent so fully before. By the time it had passed away, the walls and gates of Shahrood came in view. I had made the journey of two hundred and eighty-four miles from Teheran in two days and three quarters, including the quarter day I had lost in Deh Mullah.

Shahrood is one of the prettiest places along the entire postal route. It is shut in from the north by a semicircle of low hills. To the south it is surrounded by luxuriant gardens—woods, I would say, were they not all the result of human labour and continued care. To the north-west tower the Elburz mountains, separating the town from Asterabad and the plains of the Kara-Su and Giurgen.

North-west of the present town stands what is known as the Castle of Shahrood, and which, up to some forty or fifty years ago, constituted all that there was of the place. It is simply an enclosure about two hundred and fifty yards square, with very tall walls of unbaked brick and numerous flanking towers, within which the houses are huddled for protection. Now, however, Shahrood has increased fifty-fold, owing to the great concourse of pilgrims who flock every month to the shrine of Imam Riza at Meshed, the high road to the latter town lying through it.

There are several hundred gardens planted with apricot, fig, mulberry, and vine, the latter topping the earth walls, and hanging over them in graceful festoons. To keep them in this position one often sees the skull of a horse or camel tied to the branch, and depending on the outside of the wall. Water abounds at all times of the year, and the river from which the place takes its name, the Shah Rood, or Royal River, flowing down the middle of the principal thoroughfare, is, at the hottest part of the year, well filled. To my mind, however, it is scarce worthy of the sounding appellation given it, as it is but ten or twelve feet across, and hardly one foot in depth. A priest here told me that in his opinion the true name of the place was Sheher Rood; that is, the Town of the Prophet. There is a very considerable bazaar, which is, like all those to be met with in these countries, composed of narrow streets lined with the booths and stalls of the dealers and artisans; and off which open large courtyards surrounded by brick buildings, where the principal merchants have their counting-houses. One of the best is known as the Armenian caravanserai, where half-a-dozen Armenians carry on an export trade in cotton and raw silk, also importing, chiefly from Russia, bar iron and steel, tea, sugar, &c. Owing to its vicinity to the Turcoman frontier, the bazaar is carefully closed a

little after sunset, and should one happen to stay too long within its walls it is with no small difficulty that the *dervazéh bashi* can be got to undo the many fastenings of the massive door.

In and about the town are many caravanserais erected for the accommodation of the Meshed pilgrims. A caravanserai is simply a large enclosed yard, always with flank towers and guarded gate, lined inside with arched recesses, the floors being raised three feet above the ground. These serve as accommodation for travellers. Behind each one is a small covered chamber for use during winter. There are large vaulted stables for horses and mules, the camels always herding in a compact body in the midst of the courtyard. Over the gate are half-a-dozen chambers for the better class of travellers. There are two kinds of caravanserais—those built by Government or by bequests of charitable individuals, and those erected by private persons who make a living by supplying forage, &c. In a public caravanserai everyone has free lodging for himself and stabling for his horses. His food and forage he of course purchases, and from the sale of these arise the only profits of the guardian of the establishment. It is very much the same way with the private establishments; only that well-to-do people are expected to give a trifling sum per day for their rooms. These latter are small low square chambers with floors of beaten earth, a diminutive fireplace, and usually three unglazed windows, or rather doors, opposite the entry. There is not the smallest article of furniture of any kind. There are a number of square recesses which do duty for presses and shelves. The traveller is supposed to bring everything with him; his carpet, which serves to sit on by day and as a bed by night; his cooking apparatus, light, and food. Firewood he can purchase in the place; and he or his servant does the cooking. Before

occupying one of these chambers it is necessary to have it carefully swept out, as the last occupant has generally left behind a selection of animal life, acquaintance with which is by no means desirable. It is best not to have lights in the evening, for they attract a miscellaneous crowd of noxious creeping things—scorpions, centipedes, and Persian bugs.

Since my arrival at this town I had been suffering from the effects of a bite of one of these last-mentioned pests, received somewhere on the road from Teheran, notwithstanding all the precautions which I took to avoid such a contingency. On the day on which I arrived at Shahrood, I felt a slight soreness on the inside of the calf of my leg, and on examining the place found a small purple patch, surrounded by a dun-coloured circle. This gradually swelled until a very painful tumour was formed. Simultaneously I was attacked by strong fever, accompanied by headache and severe sickness. As I had been previously recommended to do, in case I should be bitten, I took purgative medicine and quinine, and soon almost recovered, with the exception of feeling queer pains in the joints like those resulting from rheumatism. Some people of the town, hearing of my illness, called to see me, and I was overwhelmed with advice as to the best treatment for my malady. By one I was advised to eat some clay of the place. Another recommended making up a few of the insects themselves in bread and swallowing them; and a third counselled standing on my head frequently and then rolling rapidly on the floor. But the oddest remedy of all was that proposed by a moullah, or priest, who also practised the healing art. He brought with him a large net like a hammock, in which he proposed to envelop me. My head was to be allowed to protrude, and I was then to be hung up from the branch of a tree in the garden. When I had swallowed a large quantity of new milk I was to be

turned round until the suspending cords were well twisted, and then, being let go, to be allowed to spin rapidly round. This operation was to be repeated indefinitely until sickness was produced, when other measures were to follow. I declined, however, to allow myself to be bagged in the proposed manner, especially as I had previously heard from my friend General Schindler, at Teheran, that he once saw this method of cure tried on an old woman, who, when taken down for supplementary treatment, was found to be dead. The bite of this villanous insect has often proved fatal.

The necessaries of life here, though far from cheap, had become much diminished in price during the past few months, owing to the plentiful harvest which had been gathered in. Bread was little more than half the price it was at Teheran, and it had not been found necessary to make use of the somewhat violent, if effective, repressive measures adopted at the capital with regard to the bakers. There, for overcharging for bread, their noses were summarily cut off, or their ears nailed to their own shop doors. Several instances of this occurred during my stay there. At Shahrood, as may be imagined, life is not very gay at ordinary times. My only distractions were watching the mules and horses quarrelling in the yard of the caravanserai, and the inhabitants disputing about watercourses in the street. I have already mentioned that a small stream runs down the main thoroughfare. Just opposite my window a dam had been constructed, furnished with two rude sluices of turf and stones, from one or the other of which the water was made to flow into trenches leading to gardens at different levels. There seemed to be no rule by which the supply in different directions was regulated; the parties who made the greatest row generally succeeding in securing the largest amount. At all hours of the day violent disputes were

in progress. A group of men would stand barefooted in the water, shouting at, dragging, and mauling each other, and making, if possible, more noise than the quarrelsome horses in the yard close by. They snatch off each other's hats and skull-caps, brandish primitive-looking spades in each other's faces, call upon Allah and the twelve holy Imams, and mutual massacre seems on the point of ensuing. Then one party goes away suddenly, as if convinced of the moral impossibility of the other daring to meddle with the sluices. Immediately on their departure the others set to work and arrange things to their own liking, going away in their turn. In two minutes the first set, finding their water supply diminishing, return furiously and demolish the work of their rivals. A repetition of this kind of thing seems to be the normal state of affairs with regard to this unfortunate dam.

Once a month Shahrood is enlivened by the arrival of a caravan of pilgrims from every part of Persia, on their way to the shrine of Imam Riza at Meshed. During my stay great throngs of hadjis poured into the town, arriving by the Teheran road. Shahrood is, it seems, the rallying point of the various parties. Eastward of this they all keep together, moving under protection of a military force; for, after leaving Shahrood, raiding parties of Turcomans are to be met with. The new comers were some on foot, some on horseback, and a very large number, too, on asses. There were very many women, who, when not mounted on asses or mules, were carried in *kedjavés*, hamper-like litters, slung one on each side of a camel or mule, and usually covered by a sunshade. Fully half the pilgrims—and I was informed that three thousand had arrived already—were Arabs from Baghdad, Basra, and other points in Turkish territory adjoining Persia. It is curious to see so many of a people like the Arabs, who, as a rule, are strictly

Sunnite, like the Osmanli Turks, under whose dominion they live, joining in a pilgrimage with the Shiites to a common shrine. These Arabs wore the national costume—a flowing garment reaching to the heels, and on the head a bright-coloured handkerchief, falling to the shoulders, and kept in place by a thick ring of twisted camel hair, placed over it like a diadem. The women wear very dark-coloured mantles, which envelop them from head to foot, but they do not carry the yashmak or veil like the Turks and Persians. People from almost every part of Persia and the trans-Caucasus were to be found mingled with these Arabs. They filled all the caravanserais, and crowded every nook where refuge could be obtained from the intensely hot sun. The Arabs mostly camped along the edge of the watercourse, under the shade of jujube and chenar trees; and those that had women and children with them erected rough screens by means of quilts and mantles supported on sticks. To swell the throng already in the town, the Governor of Meshed and the Hakim of Dawkban, with their retinues, had come in; pavilion tents were planted in the streets, and hundreds of horses were tethered in every direction. Amidst all this moved a number of dervishes, those inseparable adjuncts of all gatherings of people in the East. Some were instructing groups of pilgrims in the formula to be repeated at the shrine of Meshed for the thorough accomplishment of the duties of a hadji; others related wonderful tales to an eager gathering of listeners; and others, the more numerous, simply went about pestering everyone for alms. These dervishes all wear their hair flowing on their shoulders like Russian priests, and a curious dome-shaped tiara of coloured stuff. Each carries some kind of an offensive weapon—a hatchet, lance, iron-headed mace, or heavy knotted stick, as the case may be. As yet only three thousand pilgrims had arrived; two thousand more were

expected on the morrow or the day after. With such a monthly influx of pilgrims and their beasts of burden, often, I was informed, much more numerous, not to speak of the returning hadjis, it is not to be wondered that Shahrood, where they generally stay for a couple of days, should thrive tolerably.

Immediately after the last batches of the pilgrims came the military escort, the like of which it would be difficult to match elsewhere. First came a herd of nearly one hundred diminutive asses, bearing an equal number of nondescript-looking men, dressed in garments of various fashions and colours. Each carried an old-fashioned musket. This first detachment was one of mounted infantry. Next came a body of about one hundred and fifty persons on horseback, each carrying a very lengthy Persian-made rifle, having attached to it a wooden fork, the prongs tipped with iron. This fork is stuck in the ground when the soldier wishes to fire. These appendages fold upwards, the two points projecting ten inches beyond the muzzle of the gun, and giving it at a distance the appearance of a hayfork. Whether when in this position it is used in lieu of a bayonet or not, I was unable to ascertain. These cavaliers were, I suppose, dragoons of some kind, who dismount going into action, otherwise they could not make use of their forks. They were dressed with still less uniformity than their predecessors on the asses. In fact, in the entire cavalcade there was not even an attempt at uniform. Some wore long boots of brown leather, others had slippers turned up at the toes; and a considerable number had no pantaloons worth mentioning. Close behind these latter horsemen came the great element of the cavalcade, the artillery, represented by one brass smooth-bore four-pounder on a field carriage, and drawn by six horses; and at the immediate rear of this rode a man in a tattered blue and

red calico tunic, blowing furiously on a battered bugle, painted red inside like a child's halfpenny trumpet. This four-pounder was evidently the *pièce de résistance*, and as it passed the bystanders gazed on it with awe-struck imaginations. Behind the gun came a *takderavan*, or large wooden box with glazed windows borne on two horses, one before and one behind. Then came mules, each bearing two *kedjavés* covered with crimson cloth. These contained the more opulent of the pilgrims with their wives and families. About one hundred mounted men followed, a few of whom had, strange to say, Martini-Henry rifles slung at their backs, but to each of which the pair of prongs had been appended. Another hundred horsemen came dropping in at intervals, some escorting tents, others in charge of cooking utensils. This mingled and motley throng of hadjis, troops, camels, mules, asses, and dervishes went streaming by for hours, each section of the column so completely resembling another that one fancied they must, like a stage procession, be only 'making believe,' and that they were simply wheeling round the corner to return again.

The town was as full as it could hold; I could not imagine where the extra two thousand who would arrive on the morrow could be accommodated. There was not an inch of room to spare in any caravanserai, and the bakers were forced to work with a diligence which, as Persians, must have been very distasteful to them. By an odd coincidence this caravan of hadjis going to the shrine of Imam Riza at Meshed, arrived almost simultaneously with a score or so of natives of Bokhara, on their way to the Prophet's tomb at Mecca. These latter stayed in the same caravanserai with me. They came by way of Balkh, Maimana, Herat, and Meshed, to avoid passing through the Tekké country. They informed me that considerable numbers

of Tekkés were taking refuge in Persia, to avoid the impending Russian attack. It will be an ill day for the people among whom these voluntary exiles take refuge, unless there be close by some military power capable of restraining their marauding tendencies. It has been found impossible to reduce to order such of their nation even as habitually live on Persian soil and acknowledge the Shah as their Sovereign. They are somewhat like the Circassians established on the shores of the Sea of Marmora and the Greek frontier, who seemed to believe that they had a prescriptive right to harry and rob the people of the neighbourhood which they honoured with their presence. In view of their doings from timé immemorial, it is not to be wondered at that the Persians of this line of country looked forward with intense delight to the prospect of the Tekkés receiving a condign punishment during the ensuing campaign in the Akhal Tekké country.

For two days I tried in vain to find a man with an ass or a mule to carry my tent, and accompany me along the road to Budjnoord. Twice I had men engaged; and twice the bargain was broken off, on the score that the road was too dangerous, and that Tekkés were to be found along it. I consequently changed my plans, and determined to reach Budjnoord by a circuitous route, *viâ* the town of Sabzavar on the Meshed road. From Sabzavar I could easily reach either Kuchan or Budjnoord across the mountains. Following this route would also give me an opportunity of witnessing the march of a hadji caravan. We started at a little before sunset, that being the usual time for setting out on a journey in Persia, so as to avoid the extreme mid-day heats.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A PILGRIM CARAVAN.

Leaving Shahrood—Beset by mendicants—'Where is the *thob*?'—Starlight march—Novel mode of sleeping—Warlike appearance of caravan—Maiamid—Itinerant butchers—Religious drama—Persian dervishes—Waiting for the escort—An Eastern row—Besieged in a *chappar khané*—'By your beard, Emir'—A present from the governor—Religious buffoonery—Moullahs and dervishes—A weird procession—Mule bells—Our piece of artillery—A dangerous pass—A panic—Returning pilgrims—A halt.

It was near six o'clock in the afternoon when I started from Shahrood by the Meshed road, on my way to the Akhal Tekké border. I had resolved to go as far as possible with the great monthly caravan of pilgrims, both because the road is better than the mountain one, and with a view of being able to describe a pilgrim-caravan on its way to one of the most celebrated shrines of the East—that of Imam Riza. Another great advantage was that the post from Meshed passed regularly along this route every week, so that I was in direct communication with Teheran, and through that place with Europe.

An hour before my departure, my quarters in the caravanserai were regularly besieged by dervishes of every description, not to mention beggars of the ordinary kind, and it was only by a liberal distribution of small copper coins called pools and shahis that I succeeded in buying myself off. For three or four miles eastward of Shahrood the plain is exceedingly well cultivated, as, indeed, it must need be, in order to support not only the indigenous popula-

tion of the place, but also to supply food and forage for the enormous number of pilgrims, with their camels, horses, and asses, which pass annually through the place. To the left of the road, a mile away, are low hills, the watershed of the Giurgen, each available summit being crowned with a watch-tower, and in some cases by a good-sized fortalice. The military precautions deemed necessary to ensure the safe passage of the caravans speak eloquently of what must have been the state of things previously to the present comparatively safe period. An endless succession of mud walls line the road eastward from Shahrood, and occasionally the way becomes practically the same as a watercourse. On leaving my caravanserai I thought I was rid of the mendicant and dervish nuisance, but I soon discovered my mistake. Taking short cuts across the fields, they had posted themselves at different points of vantage along the narrow path, from which they not only recommenced their importunities, but almost made use of physical force to arrest my horse. There were dervishes with beards stained of a fiery-red colour, and wearing queer conical hats, who, if they did not regularly belong to the howling sect of Constantinople, most decidedly showed themselves qualified for admission to it by the fashion in which they yelled, screamed, and groaned, exhorting me in the name of the blessed Ali, and the Imams Hassan and Hussein, not forgetting Haziret Abass, and many other holy people, to give them charity. Then there were the old, the blind, and the lame—men, women, and children—hanging on to my stirrup and seizing my bridle. Some were horribly deformed, and it seemed marvellous that they should have undergone such apparently frightful disasters as were necessary to reduce them to their then present mutilated condition, and yet continue to exist. They seemed to consider that in my supposed quality of hadji on my way to Meshed I must be bursting with the

desire to distribute all my worldly property to the first comers who might think fit to ask me for it. As I slowly forced my way through this very disagreeable throng, I could not help comparing myself to the youth depicted in allegorical frontispieces of books of high moral tone of the last century, and who is represented as endeavouring to make his way, book under arm, to the temple of fame, seen at a distance on the top of a hill, a collection of ill-looking distorted fiends on either side the road grinning and grabbing at him and otherwise trying to impede his progress.

As I cleared the walls and gardens the sun was setting, and, as is usual here, a violent wind from the north-east commenced blowing, driving the sand and small gravel in one's face in a very unpleasant manner. I overtook half-a-dozen persons on horseback, the great bulk of the first detachment of pilgrims having started about an hour before I set out. Later, I found them assembled amid the ruins of a village some ten miles further on. Here there was a stream of good water, and hadjis were watering their animals and making ready for a dreary tramp of thirty miles across an arid plain, where not a drop of water would be found. The party with which I came up consisted of about two thousand persons, partly on foot, and partly mounted on various animals. Many of the former were mere children, and carried great packs on their backs. The utmost confusion prevailed as the mass of camels and mules tried to get into motion. Most of them carried litters full of women and children, and every one seemed to have some companion or friend from whom he or she had become separated in the dark. Each individual in the crowd was calling out 'Hadji!' or 'Meshedi!' as if he supposed his friend must recognise that he alone out of the couple of thousand present, all of whom were entitled to the name, was addressed. One Arab,

in a state of great excitement, came up to me, and asked, 'Hadji, can you tell me where the *thob* (cannon) is?' He seemed most anxious to be as near this, to his mind, omnipotent engine as possible. After a good deal of delay we got started, and from that point forward kept as much together as possible, for mutual protection; the gun and military force having remained behind waiting for the three thousand pilgrims expected on the next day, and who were to join us at Maiamai, our first halting-place after Shahrood, and beyond which the serious danger from Turcomans and professional robbers is supposed to begin. It was a long, weary march across a dry, stony, trackless plain, the dim starlight only just enabling us to keep along the telegraph posts, our only guide. How strange seemed these vestiges of advanced civilisation in the midst of such surroundings! I wonder how many of the motley throng that watched beneath those murmuring wires had even the faintest notion of the manner in which they worked. The condition of the line was such that it puzzled me to guess how messages could be transmitted along the wires. The insulators were dilapidated in a manner incomprehensible to me at first, but which was accounted for when I learned that they were regarded by the natives as excellent objects on which to test their skill as marksmen. A similar practice, I am told, once prevailed among the roughs of the western plains in the United States. The Shah's Government do their best to repress such amusements, and shortly before my arrival two natives had been sentenced to imprisonment for life for thus tampering with the mysterious modern improvements. The poles, too, are often half rotten, and in one place for a full half mile the wire was supported on iron hooks absolutely without insulators.

During our weary slow march of forty miles we had but one halt—that at the ruined village; and the only thing

in the shape of refreshment, if I can give it that name, partaken of by the hadjis was an occasional smoke of the water-pipe. The manner of lighting this pipe on horseback is curious, and I don't recollect ever having seen it described. Some pieces of charcoal are placed in a small wire basket as big as a hen's egg, and attached to the end of a string a yard long. Some tinder is lighted with a flint and steel, and placed among the charcoal. The basket is then whirled rapidly round by means of the string until the charcoal is thoroughly ignited, and the pipe is then kindled. On a very dark night, when the road is very bad, the horseman lights his way by placing tow or cotton in the little basket, which, when whirled, gives light enough to enable one to keep out of holes and ruts, or from falling over precipices. All night long, as we wound slowly across the desert, the *kaliouns* might be seen gleaming at intervals in the dark column, sending meteor-like trains of sparks behind it on every gust of the evening breeze. As the moon rose I was able to take a look at my companions. Very many, mounted on the most diminutive of asses, were fast asleep, their arms clasping the necks of the animals, and more than once we heard the 'thud' of some somnolent rider falling to the ground. Some laid themselves like sacks across the asses' backs, and thus managed to sleep comfortably. The march was a tiresome one, even to one mounted on horseback, and I dismounted more than once to stretch my legs. I could not help envying the people who were snugly stowed away in their *kedjavés*, sleeping comfortably; though of course the cramped position of the legs necessary in such a conveyance would be rather inconvenient for a European, especially if he were forced to adopt it for twelve hours at a time. The pilgrims on foot kept up bravely, and generally led the van, though each carried all his travelling necessaries on his back. Just as the sun rose we

came in sight of our *menzil*, or halting-place, the village or town of Maiamai. In its neighbourhood on all sides were fields of corn, and running water abounded. We passed some large camel trains laden with cotton, on their way to Shahrood and Asterabad. As we rode along in the pale morning light, each member of the caravan bristling with arms, we had much more the air of a hostile expedition marching against the village than a troop of pious hadjis on our way to a shrine.

Maiamai, or Maiamid, is not quite so large as Shahrood, but is still a considerable place. It is strongly fortified after the fashion of the country, and contains a caravanserai of baked brick, exceedingly well built, and quite a fortress in its way. It has embrasures for cannon, and the bricks around them are well dotted with Turcoman bullet-marks. Within it is the telegraph station. This caravanserai was speedily crowded to overflowing by the pilgrims, those who could not find accommodation there camping under the shade of a row of large chenar trees close by. I had the good fortune to secure the little room over the entrance-gate of the post-house. It was but ten feet square, and apart from the door were two windows of equal size, at opposite sides of the room, none of the three openings having any means of being closed. The Arab contingent of our party was camped close by. Owing to the great influx of pilgrims, food was very dear—that is, for the country—a very poor fowl costing over a shilling. Some butchers had found it worth their while to accompany the pilgrims for the sake of the amount of meat they could sell them; and shortly after our arrival half-a-dozen sheep were ready skinned and cleaned. Without this supply fresh meat would be unattainable, as the inhabitants of the place scarcely ever eat flesh. When the party had reposed a little after the long night's march, and had eaten their

morning meal, the rolling of a drum was heard under the chenar trees, and a crowd began to assemble. A scene in the religious drama founded on the massacre of the Imams Hassan and Hussein was about to be acted. This play, which seems to enter into the programme of all Persian religious festivities whatever, and which is an exact Mussulman counterpart of the mediæval mystery plays, is exceedingly long, the proper representation of the piece requiring a daily performance of a couple of hours for weeks at a time. As the pilgrims march they are treated to one act at each halting-place throughout the journey. At the third roll of the drum the actors make their appearance. First came a black-bearded fellow, dressed in the ancient Saracenic fashion in a coat of chain mail over a long green gown, long brown leather boots, and a spiked hemispherical helmet, round which was a crimson handkerchief, rolled turbanwise. He was armed with a formidable-looking curved scimitar, and was followed by a man who seemed to have picked up somewhere a British soldier's scarlet uniform with dark blue facings. There was a tall man who seemed to represent a king. Two boys were dressed as women, for their religion does not allow persons of the female sex to take part in such proceedings. Another man mounted on a white horse wore a huge blue turban, and held a child in his arms. There was a good deal of monotonous chanting and declamatory singing, coupled with a stage compact between the man in armour and the other in the red coat, a good deal of going to and fro of the white horse and its rider, and, after an hour or so, the acting wound up by a collection of money from the onlookers. The singing was to my mind most monotonous and dirge-like, or else ridiculously pompous, and with a vast interlarding of 'Allah Mahomet' in a disagreeable nasal tone. There was, however, a kind of sword song by

the man in the helmet, which he accentuated by touching the blade of his sword with a roll of paper, and which in air resembled one of the old French *romaunts de gestes*. When the actors had departed, several dervishes divided the attention of the crowd. Some gave religious instructions; others narrated funny stories to any who would listen to and pay them; others, again, played juggling tricks, and vended small articles, such as plated earrings, combs, and medical nostrums. The Persian dervish is a jack-of-all-trades. He acts as priest, mountebank at a fair, story-teller, pedlar, or doctor, as occasion may require. At bottom he is generally a sharp fellow, living comfortably by his wits, despite the external squalor which some of the confraternity affect.

Evening was now close at hand, and, it having been announced that we were to start at sunset, I had everything got ready. Then a council of the principal hadjis was held, and it was decided to wait for the remainder of the pilgrims, the cannon, and the troops, previous to venturing through a mountain pass about six miles further on, where caravans had been repeatedly assailed and plundered by Turcomans. Our escort was to arrive shortly, and to take post in the dangerous ravines. Then, when the moon had risen, the hadjis and the cannon were to come on. At midnight, just as I thought the starting time had certainly come, in marched the soldiers back from their strategic position. Some one had brought word that twenty-five mounted Turcomans had been seen hovering in the vicinity of the dangerous ground! Though we were two thousand strong, and had a company of soldiers with us, it was resolved to wait for the cannon and the remainder of the pilgrims, which would swell our numbers to over five thousand. This incident will help to convey a notion of the intense dread of Turcomans with which Persians are inspired. We

accordingly made up our minds to go to bed, and wait for the following evening, marching during the day seemingly being a thing not to be dreamed of for a moment. Besides, the second detachment of pilgrims would not arrive until daybreak, and would need a day's rest before proceeding any further. The next day passed very much like the preceding one, save that the morning was enlivened by an incident which at one moment threatened to put an end to my further pilgrimage. About eight o'clock, as I was sitting cross-legged on my carpet, writing some notes, I heard a sudden and violent hubbub in the open space in front of my window, under the trees. The Arab contingent and a number of Persians were charging about, furiously belabouring each other with sticks. It appeared that some dispute had arisen between the Baghdad Arabs and the Teheran pilgrims, and that hot words had been spoken as to the relative merits of their respective countries. Each, in his quality of hadji, carried a staff five feet long and about two and a half inches thick at the stouter end, and the hadjis, having got excited, were banging each other with their pilgrims' staves. At first I thought it was some rude play, a kind of 'baiting the bear,' such as I had seen practised among the Turcomans, and in which rather severe knocks are given and received with the utmost good humour. However, I soon discovered by the number of holy persons stretched on the ground that 'bateing' in a Hibernian sense was going on. Gradually the Arabs became very much excited, and behaved like mad people, jumping, dancing, and shouting the *tecbir*, or Arab war-cry. Matters were getting bad for the Teheranis, when the latter drew their swords and *handjars*. Notwithstanding this unfair advantage, however, they were scattered and beaten off the field, and forced to take refuge in every direction, some rushing into the *chappar hané* in which I was staying.

The Arabs now assembled together, showing each other the stabs and cuts which they had received from the Persians; and they seemed to come to the resolution to pay them back in their own coin. They rushed off in search of weapons, and speedily reassembled. At this juncture my servant unluckily happened to go out in search of corn for the horses. He wore at his belt a large broad-bladed *handjar*, upon spying which an Arab woman cried out that he was one of the people who had used deadly weapons, and immediately hurled a large paving-stone at him. Then the whole crowd set upon him. He retreated hurriedly to the *chappar hané*, the doors of which were closed before the Arabs could get in. These latter then tried to smash in the door, shrieking out that they would massacre every one within the place. The Teheran pilgrims within now showed themselves on the ramparts, and commenced abusing the assailants in unmeasured terms. The Arabs thereupon renewed their efforts to break the door, and showered bricks and stones on the ramparts, and also into my room. In a twinkling the floor was covered with missiles, and mud fell in heaps with each concussion; my servant rushed into the chamber, his face all bloody and disfigured from a blow of a great stone. I showed myself, thinking that my European costume would induce the Arabs to desist. I called on them to go away; but all to no purpose. I was made the target for over a hundred stone-throwers. The attack redoubled, and the assailants showed signs of being about to attempt an escalade. I felt certain that if they got in we should be all lost, so I sprang for my revolver and sword, and, posting myself at a loophole of a flanking tower, prepared to fire at the first who attempted to climb. Meantime, I cried out to some neutral spectators to run and fetch the Governor, and to tell him that our lives were in danger. This functionary arrived in a few minutes, bringing with

him a force of armed men, who put a stop to the attack. Then the Governor, together with the Arab chiefs and about twenty of their men, came up to my room. I produced my pass from the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Teheran and complained that I had been attacked in my room without provocation. The Arabs responded by exhibiting their wounds, and horrid gashes some of them were. Notwithstanding the thick rolls of camel-hair, handkerchiefs and skull-caps, some of the scalp wounds were very deep. One man's thumb was nearly severed from his hand. 'And,' said one of the chiefs, 'the cowards drew weapons on us, who had only sticks in our hands; pretty Mussulmans these!' The Arabs now formally apologised to me for having thrown stones at me, stating that they did not know I was a stranger, but at the same time charged my servant with being one of the persons who wounded them. They swore that they recognised him, and one went so far as to swear by my beard, which he laid hold of in an alarming manner. 'By your beard, Emir,' he said, 'it is true.' However, we settled the matter peacefully, the Arabs promising not to bear any spite against the Teheranis. So ended a matter which at one moment threatened to conclude disagreeably enough. The Governor, Mahomet Khan, a little old man, requested me to give him a paper bearing my seal, stating that he had promptly and effectually suppressed the riot. This I did with pleasure. Shortly after his withdrawal he sent me, in true Eastern fashion, a present of fruit and bread, on a large silver tray, covered over with an embroidered cloth, and escorted by three servants.

Apart from this little episode, the day passed off as that preceding it. The second contingent of pilgrims had arrived, among them being many women, evidently of the better classes, to judge from the size and magnificence of their tents and the numbers of their attendants. The

entire open space east of the town was converted into a camp—thousands of horses tethered everywhere. As usual at midday the drum rolled, the people collected, and again, under the shade of the great chenar trees, the wrongs of Ali and the woes of Hassan and Hussein were rehearsed. Again the dervishes practised their different *métiers*; and again, as the sun went down, came the *muezzim's* call, echoing, long-drawn, over the stilly plain. As darkness set in, lights twinkled everywhere, and camp fires blazed all over the bivouac. I marvel where the fuel came from, for here trees are too precious to be cut down for the purpose. Ten o'clock was the hour fixed for our departure. Meantime we amused ourselves as we best could. I was dreadfully annoyed by the vile religious buffoonery of a dervish under my window, who was narrating to a crowd of listeners some episode in the deaths of the two everlasting Imams one never hears the end of here—Hussein and Hassan. I could not see the fellow, but I guessed from his voice that he was a young man with long black hair, who during the day generally acted as story-teller and pedlar. He told his story, blubbering with simulated grief, his voice almost inarticulate with apparently hysterical sobs and groans. If I had not been too vexed I could have been amused at the lachrymose tone of interrupted voice, like that of a child who has been whipped, which he knew how to assume. As it was, I should have been tempted to throw something out of the window at him had I not been afraid of evoking a storm like that of the morning. The women present occasionally struck up a wail in chorus, clapping their hands in token of extreme grief and emotion. These dervishes are a set of thoroughgoing, shameless impostors. He who can groan and sob and blubber the most extravagantly is accounted the best and holiest. I am not surprised that the moullahs, or

regular clergy, dislike intensely these itinerant religion-mongers.

At ten o'clock we were all in motion, but it was a good hour before we got clear of the camping ground. The artillery bugle sounded three times, to give us warning of the departure of the escort. Everyone wanted to be as near as possible to the cannon, so that nobody was willing to go forward or to hold back. As a result I found myself and my horse standing in a stream of water, jammed in between *kedjavés* full of women, mule-litters, and camels. Close in front of me was a collection of coffins, containing putrefying human bodies, fastened across the backs of asses, and smelling horribly. They were the remains of people who had left money enough to secure their being interred close to the sacred precincts at Meshed, and were being brought from heaven knows what far-off corner of Persia. Slowly and with difficulty I forced my way through the throng; for the ground was very irregular, and, though torches, lanterns, and fires blazed on every side, the press was too close to let one catch a glimpse of them. Outside the radius of the firelight all was nearly pitch dark, for the moon had not yet risen, and the stars shed but a dim light in the flare of the fires. My horse had got out of the stream on to what seemed a narrow footpath. After a few minutes I felt myself getting strangely elevated above the people on each side of me. I halted until a light was brought, and then discovered that I was on the top of a mud wall four feet high. In a few minutes more I should have been twelve feet from the ground, on the top of a wall but two feet thick, a rather awkward place for an equestrian in the dark. I mention this by way of indicating how difficult, under the circumstances, the movement of five thousand men, women, and children, with their beasts of burden, must have been, especially when there was not a trace of a road,

or any central directing command. One would have supposed that as Government went to the trouble of providing a military escort, it would also have appointed some director or *caravan bashi* to marshal the proceedings. Notwithstanding the eager desire to be near the all-powerful and all-protecting piece of artillery, the force of circumstances at last compelled the seething mass of human beings and beasts to defile in the required direction. Close by on our right were the two main peaks of the Maiamai range of hills overhanging the town, and looming darkly against the star-sprinkled sky. The track we followed lay along their northern flank and rose gradually to the dreaded defile some ten miles away. The road was rough and disagreeable in the extreme. Long sharp ribs of rock running parallel to each other protruded like chisel edges. Boulders, holes, and trenches abounded. As the eye became accustomed to the dim starlight, one could make out, little by little, the details of the struggling, stumbling column. One was nigh suffocated by the dust thrown up by so many thousand trampling feet. The entire caravan could not have covered less than a couple of miles of road, and a strange sight it presented as I rode as quickly as possible along its flank, trying to reach the head, in order to be out of the way of the dust and the pestilential smell from the coffins, which, instead of being kept together and in the rear, were mixed up and down the column with the mules and camels, the dead in their coffins each moment jostling and elbowing the living in their litters and *kedjavés*. How those who were forced to jog along in company with these ghastly neighbours, and to bear the general din around them, stood the combined noise and smell, not to speak of the dust, I cannot conceive. The uproar was outrageous. Each mule, besides carrying a pair of litters, one containing some stout old hadji, and the other his wife and a

couple of children, was further handicapped by an enormous pair of cylindrical bronze bells, hung from the bottoms of the litters; many had half a dozen smaller ones each. At one time I got blocked among the litters close in the rear of the gun, where the noise was simply hideous. The big bronze bells crashed and boomed; the smaller ones jangled, ever so many thousand all at once; the gun jolted noisily over the rough path; hadjis shouted, asses brayed, and mules vocalised in their own particular fashion. It was like being shut up in the belfry of some cathedral in which the ringers are at work, in company with the concentrated noonday noises of the busiest street of the metropolis. Almost every mounted pilgrim was whirling the little fire-cup by which he ignited charcoal for his *kalioun*, this time not with a view of smoking, but of illuminating the ground beneath his horse's feet, and so keeping out of the pitfalls which occurred at every step. The whole dark line resembled some gigantic train of waggons with blazing fiery wheels. The impalpable white dust boiled upwards in swaying columns like the steam of twenty locomotive engines. The hollow clang of the camel bells, and the fiendish tearing groans of the camels, as they stalked swingingly along, laden with tents, boxes, and litters, joined in happy unison. Behind and in front of the gun, with its six horses, were two score of infantry, mounted on small asses. The men were rather big, and the asses the most diminutive that I ever saw. In the faint starlight their general effect was that of a number of four-legged men scrambling over the stones, and bearing long hayforks over their shoulders. A superstitious stranger coming suddenly upon this weird-looking procession, might easily take it, with its unearthly sounds, flaming circles, and foully smelling coffins, for some infernal troupe issuing from the bowels of the sable hill hard by, to indulge in

a Satanic promenade during the witching hours of the night.

As we drew near the dreaded ravines the greatest anxiety began to prevail; and the caravan drew into still closer order. Those who at first pushed forward valiantly, now fell back upon the gun and its escort; the bugle sounded, and we came to a standstill. Just in front of us, at the entrance of the pass, was an old fort with tall curtain walls and crenelated towers. The half-waned moon was just rising beyond its crumbling battlements, shedding an uncertain light over the vast dim plain reaching away to the north. I could not help thinking of what would be the result if the merest handful of Turcoman horsemen swept down upon the straggling, unwieldy column. The gun, absolutely the most useless weapon among us, could do nothing, even if the gunners did not bolt at the first sight of the enemy. Besides, even with the steadiest artillerymen in the world, this gun, shut in by crowds of terrified, unreasoning pilgrims, would not be able to fire a single shot; and to fire with a small cannon in the dark at Turcoman cavalry whirling down in their usual loose order would be little short of absurd. It would be its first and last discharge. The few infantrymen, with their cumbrous old muzzle-loading rifles, which it would take five minutes to load, might also be set aside as practically useless, even if they had had bayonets, which, for some unaccountable reason, they had not. Anything like rallying the more bellicosely inclined of the pilgrims would, under the circumstances, be out of the question. It would be a thorough *sauve qui peut*, and the best thing that could be done under the circumstances; for to stay would be but to court certain death or capture. Why the Turcomans should give themselves the trouble to attack one of these hadji caravans passes my comprehension. It seems, however, that they

have frequently waylaid them, and still do occasionally. This must be when they have got news that rich people are among the pilgrims who can afford to pay handsome ransoms, or who are sure to have valuable effects with them. As a rule, very little plunder indeed is to be obtained from the members of an ordinary caravan, such as ours was, and in which a large proportion of the pilgrims are little better than mendicants. After a short pause we screwed up our courage and entered the defile, each man shouting and yelling as if possessed, in order, as I understood, to terrify the robbers. If noise alone could do that, we had already been making quite enough to frighten the entire population of the Akhal Tekké. We went through the pass as quickly as the men on foot could possibly proceed. The confusion and din which prevailed during the hour which our passage of the ravine occupied cannot be easily imagined. I had seen the evacuation of Tolosa by the Liberal population during the Carlist investment; I had been in the midst of the precipitate flight of the remnant of the Turkish army from the field of the Aladja Dagh to Kars, and in many other strange positions of the kind; but this rush of hadjis through the Maiamai pass bore away the palm for confusion and uproar. The entire cavalcade became nearly invisible in the dust-cloud raised by its rapid progress. At ten yards one could barely distinguish the outline of a camel, like that of some shadowy, mis-shapen phantom gliding along in the moonlight; and one gasped for breath in the stifling atmosphere. The defile occasionally widened out, so as to allow easy passage for twenty abreast; but there were places where one camel only could pass at a time between the steeply-scarped rocks on either side. It was just at these places that the hadjis made desperate rushes, each one trying to be the first through. The result, of course, was a block and a dead stand-still.

Sometimes we heard loud cheering in front. This was when the leading files of the caravan met with a party of returning pilgrims. Usually the direst apprehension existed on both sides lest the new-comers should be robbers, and the cheering was the expression of mutual relief at discovering the fact that both parties were friends. The *selam aleik* salutation, which has passed into a mere polite formality in towns, becomes on occasions like this the challenge of the desert. 'Peace be with you,' is shouted from afar when strangers are discerned approaching. The answer, '*Ou el selam alikoum*,' comes back as a welcome message of peace. But should the reply be not given, each one gets ready his weapons. I have met with robbers who refused to return the salutation, and who went sullenly by, hindered from attacking only by the strength of the party with whom I was. As we neared the eastern end of the Maiamai Pass we began to encounter long trains of camels from Meshed, laden with cotton. These trains were a welcome sight, for they showed us, as did the returning pilgrims, that the road was clear. The pass itself is a kind of long, winding gully, girt on either side by low, rounded hills, occasionally forming long parapet-like ridges oblique to the defile. No better place than this pass could possibly be devised for an ambuscade. Still, a single military or police post on a commanding point, and furnished with a solitary piece of artillery for signalling and offensive purposes, would effectually prevent the possibility of a caravan being waylaid here. Yet this is not established, and week after week an unfortunate gun is trailed along the entire route, and a handful of useless soldiers put to no end of trouble, and made to suffer useless fatigue in accompanying caravans which they are entirely impotent to protect.

Dawn was fast brightening as we caught sight of the halting-place for the day. It was an extensive caravanserai,

the largest I had hitherto seen, and rose amid the solitude of the plain like some enchanted castle. It was named Miandasht, and was but twenty-eight miles from our last starting point, though on account of our numerous halts and the nature of the road we had been over eight hours in traversing it. The first rays of the rising sun were glinting on the cupola of the main building as our celebrated cannon rumbled into the great square, and we all commenced preparing our quarters for the day. The pilgrims on foot had kept up bravely. Indeed, they were among the first to arrive. Poor fellows, it was indeed a pilgrimage for them. I scarcely believed that in these latter degenerate days religious zeal could carry people so far.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### MIANDASHT—SABZAVAR.

Caravanserai scenes—Travellers' lodgings—Persian architecture—The midday siesta—Departure of a caravan—The road to Sabzavar—Strategical positions—Abasabad—Persian coinage—Sadrabad—A ruined country—Abandoned irrigation works—The Kal Mura river—An ancient bridge—Mazinan—Minars and mosques—A decayed town—Sabzavar—Commercial relations with France—Ice manufacture—Travellers' annoyances—Flies and scorpions—Parting from the pilgrims—Begging on the road—Persians and Turcomans—An official reception in Persia—Oriental diplomacy—News and newspapers—The wardens of the Turcoman border—Timorous guides—A travelled Persian's impressions of London—Patti as a cancan dancer—Start for Kuchan.

MIANDASHT is merely a station on the route like many of those already passed, and has no pretensions to rank even as a village. The caravanserai is of unusual size and solidity, but there is no other building in the place. Nothing can be more striking to a European's eye than one of these typically Eastern buildings, standing alone and desolate in the trackless and arid plain. The work of man is there, but of human life there is no sign. The soil, of yellow marl strewn thick with pebbles, is devoid of a blade of grass or other vegetation, and reflects the burning rays of the sun like a brazen shield. From such a plain rises a huge embattled structure, like one of the great mediæval castles of Europe in size, and somewhat in appearance. The circuit of the walls of this one is fully an English mile, and is broken by numerous projecting towers, and relieved by huge gate-ways, arched in the

peculiar ogival forms of Persian and Saracenic architecture. The gates of massive oak are double, and thickly studded and barred with iron. The whole is built of an extremely hard burned yellow brick. The nucleus of this Miandasht structure was the caravanserai of Shah Abass the Great, whose name is duly recorded in the inscription over the great portal. Above the latter rises a large flat cupola of the Eastern type. Another and much larger building has since been added, but at what date I could not ascertain. Its first courtyard forms an immense square in front of the older caravanserai, and is divided from a second of similar dimensions by a row of buildings which joins the ramparts at both ends. The inner side of the rampart is lined with a row of vaulted rooms, each having a shallow arched vestibule in front. The latter, from the free circulation of air through it, and its consequent coolness, is the place preferred by summer travellers for lodgings. The row of central buildings has a second story, closely resembling the casemates in European fortresses, with long dim corridors; and throughout, the walls, floors, and roof are of solid brickwork, impervious alike to rain and sun. Nothing can be more delightful on a sultry day than to pass from the burning heat and glare of the stony plain into the cave-like coolness and dim light of these long arcades and vaults. Indeed, the architect who designed this Miandasht caravanserai seems to have thoroughly grasped the requirements of his building, and to have admirably adapted it for the purposes of shelter against the burning heat. In winter, no doubt, such a dark abode must be chilling, but few travellers ever cross these plains in winter. The only fault I found with the builders was in the construction of their stairs, which it seems to be an object to make as nearly vertical as possible. The maximum of rise with the minimum of foot tread seems to be the

aspiration of the Persian stair-builder, and even in the heights of his steps in the same flight he sees no need of uniformity. The first step in the stairs leading to the room, or end of the corridor which I occupied, was two and a half feet high, or about four times that of an ordinary European stair. The second was two feet in height, and the rest eighteen inches each, with a tread of not more than six inches wide. Climbing such an ascent is no easy task to a traveller whose legs are stiff with riding, and it is no wonder that the people of the country have a general dislike to going up-stairs. Indeed, in some of the earth-built caravanserais, where steps originally designed like those of Miandasht have fallen into dilapidation, one would almost need an alpenstock to ascend them. Accordingly, the *bala hané* over the gate is seldom occupied by the natives.

Water is abundantly provided in this caravanserai. Within the courtyards, and also outside the walls, are some half-dozen large underground tanks, with brick domes built over them to prevent evaporation and keep the water fresh and cool. A flight of forty wide steps gives access to the cisterns, which are closely guarded by the care-takers of the establishment. It is true each traveller is allowed all he needs for his personal use, but the fluid cannot be wasted, nor is it allowed to be given to the animals. The latter are supplied with water of poorer quality from a tank some distance off, and a small sum is exacted for each animal. The drying up in summer of the underground canals which feed the tanks necessitates this economy. In winter the water flows in abundantly, but during the rest of the year it has to be stored for the use of the caravans. Thus, were it not for the tanks at Miandasht, it would be necessary to carry water in skins.

The sun was just rising as we entered the station, and in a few minutes hundreds of fires were smoking as the

pilgrims prepared their morning meal. Dealers in various articles of food, some of whom had accompanied the caravan for purposes of trade, displayed their wares, and advertised them with all their ingenuity. One man, seated in the archway of one of the lower vaults, drew attention to the sour curds which formed his stock-in-trade by uttering a sort of gurgling sound something like the hoarse gasps of a vulture. Another, whom I for some time thought was engaged in calling a drove of cows to their stable, proved to be a vendor of firewood. This fuel consists of the roots of a small scraggy thorn-bush that grows here and there throughout the desert, and which have to be torn up with enormous labour. In fact, nearly all the poorer members of the caravan had something to sell. Whenever we reached a patch of coarse grass some mendicant pilgrim would dismount from his little donkey, cut a load for the animal, and trudge on foot through the burning sands to the next station for the sake of the couple of pence to be realised from the sale of his fodder. Firewood such as I have described was provided in general in the same way, for the local resources of the caravanserais are entirely inadequate to meet the requirements of a large caravan. It is surprising on how little these people can live, even when undergoing the fatigues of travelling through the desert on foot. A piece of bread and a morsel of goat's cheese, with a handful of apricots, constitute their meal. The richer pilgrims only can indulge in the luxury of an occasional piece of chicken or spitted meat. All, however, drink tea, and everyone, no matter how poor, manages to prepare a little, which is usually drunk without sugar, the latter being a delicacy reserved for the rich only. When breakfast is over, and the horses, camels, and asses fed and watered, everyone retires to rest. During the burning hours of midday a stillness like that of death

settles over the place. Throughout the East midday is essentially the hour of repose. In Persia a man would as soon think of leaving the house or travelling half a mile at that time as we would of selecting midnight during a downpour of rain for a promenade. In Spain, I believe, it is said that only dogs and Englishmen are abroad during the siesta hours. In Persia, even those exceptions need not be made. I felt too much worried by the night's journey to be able to sleep during the first part of the day, and I availed myself of the interval to proceed with my writing; but about noon the hot wind made its influence felt so overpoweringly even in these cool vaults, that I fell asleep almost with the pen in my hand, and remained unconscious, with my head propped against the wall by way of pillow, until a general movement in the courts below and the tinkle of the camel bells awoke me as the hour of our departure approached. This travelling by night exclusively is a terrible hindrance to rapid progress. Moving over uneven ground in the dark is necessarily slow work. Though it would be impossible to travel on these plains in the full heat of the day, I must say I think our halts were unnecessarily prolonged. A rest from eight in the morning till five in the afternoon, with a stop of a couple of hours at midnight, would meet all the needs of the case, and allow a much faster rate of advance. But Orientals cannot appreciate a European's eagerness to get to his journey's end.

The scene, as the caravan was making ready to start, was a most picturesque one. The sun was going down with almost noontide splendour behind the amethyst tinted hills that showed indistinctly on the western horizon—

> Not as in northern lands, obscurely bright,
> But one unclouded blaze of living light.

A few taper clouds like golden fishes poised motionless in the

opal depths, alone broke the continuity of the vast silent arch above the desert. Around us, the boundless plain was one sheet of aërial purple. Far away to the south gleamed whitely the lonely tomb of some forgotten warrior or saint; and, further still, a solitary well, with its single straggling chenar tree—emblems of life in the wilderness. A tall dust column was waltzing solemnly eastward in the rising evening breeze, now breaking into viewless sand mist, now re-forming, bowing and caracolling like some sportive living creature, the very prototype of the *gin* of Eastern story, the enraged genius who came to slay the merchant that had thrown a date-stone into his son's eye. In the courtyard below the window of my lodging, people in every costume of the East were sitting or lying on the ground, under the horse-shoe arches of the arcades or on the terraced tank covers, smoking their water-pipes or drinking tea from their *samovars*, a Russian utensil now found everywhere in the East. Others were performing their evening ablutions, a companion or attendant pouring water from a metal jug over their hands. These ablutions are little more than a matter of form, especially before prayers. For the feet, a damp hand is passed lightly over the instep; that is all. Other pilgrims were standing on their little carpets with their faces towards the *keblah* and their hands held before them like an open book, commencing their evening devotions. Some similarly engaged, rose and sank during their orisons like the piston-rod of a steam engine in slow motion as they prostrated themselves. From tower and terrace a dozen self-appointed *muezzims* chanted their prayer-call, which echoed mournfully along the neighbouring plain. Camels and mules laden for the road, with their bells tinkling at every motion, stood around everywhere. The cupola and turrets of Shah Abass's caravanserai stood out boldly against the evening

sky, and below, in the middle of the square, our cannon was conspicuous. As the sun disappeared slowly behind the horizon, and dim twilight settled over 'the level waste, the rounding gray' across which our path lay, the artillery bugles gave the signal for departure, and I had to scramble down the steep caravanserai steps and once more start on my journey.

Our road from Miandasht to Sabzavar lay across a stony plain, below the level of which it sometimes sank like a shallow railroad cutting, and at other times it was crossed by sharp rocky mounds, over which, in the dark, there was many a stumble and fall. A strong sultry wind blew from the east, as it usually does here just after sunset, and filled our mouths, eyes, and noses with clouds of sand and dust. At night, during the prevalence of this wind, my horse's coat became most remarkably electrical, streams of sparks flying from his neck and mane wherever the reins touched them. I could draw sparks from the animal's ears with my metal-ringed riding-whip. About two in the morning we entered a series of deep sandy ravines, dominated on all sides by steep craggy ridges. An adequate military force posted on these ridges would have complete control of the communications between Teheran and Meshed, and it would be almost impossible to dislodge it from the position. Emerging from these defiles we reached Abasabad, a wretched little place containing a couple of hundred houses and a ruined citadel. Some of the houses were enclosed by a dilapidated mud wall, but the most important part of the town was the caravanserai, which was roomy, and solidly built of burned brick. Large as it was, it was overcrowded by the multitude of pilgrims, and I had to take refuge in the post-house outside, where, between the heat and the flies, I was unable either to sleep or to work, and passed a dismal day enough. The inhabitants

are all agriculturists and silk manufacturers. When the bugles sounded the signal for departure I proceeded to settle my account; but owing to the peculiar notions prevalent respecting the coinage, it was a full quarter of an hour before I could find some silver money that would be accepted in payment. All the money I had was perfectly good in the capital and the surrounding districts, but, for some not very easily understood reason, the people in this place objected to a very large proportion. The lengths to which people here will go for the sake of a few pence must be seen to be appreciated fully. They do not understand gold. On the other hand, a large sum in silver is a source of both anxiety and danger. Its bulk and weight make it conspicuous, and it must be carried on one's own horse, and never trusted beyond arm's length, night or day. Every eye is on it, and every brain plotting how to make away with it—in all likelihood your own servants most of all. A party of wild horsemen may happen to draw up at the hut where one is staying, and they immediately learn that a stranger is there who carries a large sum of money. From that moment, unless one keeps constantly on his guard, he is liable to be attacked from an ambuscade, or by open force. After all this, it is hard to find that the silver so jealously watched will not pay your way without endless disputes. The Government should call in its coin if light, or take measures to enforce its circulation. It is not impossible that the whole objection to the Hamadan coins is a mere popular whim based on idle rumours, perhaps set afloat by some crafty speculators, Jews or Armenians, who think thus to buy in the objectionable coins at a low rate. One can hardly credit how easily similar stories are set afloat in Persia.

From Abasabad to Mazinan, the next station, the road crosses a dreary flat, entirely uncultivated, though plenti-

fully supplied with water from the Kal Mura river, which has left marks of extensive inundations in numerous white deposits of salt. This plain would undoubtedly produce abundant crops of rice if properly cultivated. About ten miles from our starting place were several ponds, evidently supplied by springs, and surrounded by extensive reed-covered marshes. An old fort stands near the ponds, and some ten miles further is the large fortress of Sadrabad, about five hundred yards square, with high brick walls furnished with large semicircular bastions. Sadrabad was built by Shah Abass the Great, and was once very important. It is now comparatively neglected. Extensive reservoirs and covered tanks in great numbers are close to the fortifications, and there is a well-built caravanserai on the opposite side of the road. A couple of miles eastward we crossed the Kal Mura, a river about forty yards wide here, and tolerably deep, though in the maps it is usually marked as dry in summer. It rises about thirty or forty miles to the north, among the hills, and flows about as far south, when it disappears in the salt desert. The country around was once extensively cultivated, as the traces of the irrigating ditches show—in all likelihood at the time when the conquest of Merv by Nadir Shah had put a stop to border feuds. Nowadays, cultivation is only attempted immediately around the towns, and even there, probably from lack of manuring, the crops are miserably poor, the soil being apparently exhausted, though naturally well adapted for grain growing. We crossed the Kal Mura on a high bridge of several arches, twenty-five feet above the water in the centre, and well built of brick. The ascent on each side has a gradient of at least twenty-five degrees, and, being paved with smooth pebbles, is by no means an easy climb for the mules. The height of the bridge indicates the passage of a large body of water in the

winter, during which season the road must be all but impassable.

It was early dawn when we reached Mazinan, which is the collective name of a group of villages, each fortified separately and bearing a distinct name. The extent of the ruins around shows that it has once been a more important place, but now it contains altogether about eight hundred houses, and some four thousand inhabitants, spread over a space of about four miles long and three wide. There is a wretched little bazaar, where a few artisans eke out a living, but otherwise the community is entirely agricultural, raising corn and making silk. A night's travel from Mazinan, during which we passed a place called Sulkar, brought us to Mehr, a village with a very small caravanserai, consisting solely of a few arched niches in a mud wall. From this place to Sabzavar is only twenty-eight miles, the road being level, and passing through the large village of Riwad between the two places. Around Sabzavar, the Green City, the plain is highly cultivated, and mulberry trees, the only ones to be found here, are abundant, whole acres being planted with them. Numerous villages and fortified residences are scattered over the plain, which appears from numerous evidences to have been formerly still more densely populated. A very remarkable minaret, the mosque to which it was once attached having completely disappeared, stands about two miles from the town. It is built of flat reddish-brown brick on a concrete foundation, not over eleven feet in diameter at the base, but it rises to the height of a hundred and twenty feet, being as slender in appearance as a factory chimney in Europe. The shaft has the entasis which the ancient Greeks deemed essential to the beauty of their columns, and is ornamented at intervals by bands of rose-pattern tiles, disposed among rows of obliquely set bricks.

The style of decoration is peculiar to this tower, and there is an absence of the coloured enamels so common in Persian buildings, and an air of originality about the whole work, that stamp it as the production of no ordinary architect. Indeed, the minaret, at least as it occurs in Turkish architecture, is rarely met with in Persia. The *muezzim* calls the faithful to prayer in the latter country from the summit of a dome, or from a cage-like structure on some prominent part of the mosque—not from the gallery of a prayer tower. Only at Semnan, Damkhan, and Sabzavar, have I met with the true slender minaret, and all three were of very considerable antiquity. The foundations of this tower have been exposed by the removal of the earth from around them, and the steps inside have been almost all taken away, apparently for use elsewhere, only their spiral supports being left in place. I scrambled up the latter to the top with considerable trouble, and found the marks of a wooden platform, now gone. Around the town were numerous ruins of brick buildings, pointing to the former existence of a large town. Some of the older tombs were embellished with coloured bricks and tiles, and the dome of one was covered with copper.

The present town of Sabzavar is rectangular, and about three quarters of a mile by half a mile in dimensions. It is enclosed by a wall and towers, the latter partly and the former wholly built of sun-dried bricks, or adobes, as they are styled in Spanish America. The bazaar consists of two streets, running parallel, and roofed with horizontal rafters laid across on the tops of the stalls, and covered with felt, matting, or in places with branches. There is also an Armenian commercial caravanserai, where some Russian Armenians from Tiflis and Erivan carry on a considerable trade in silk. Most of the articles offered for sale in the bazaars were either Russian or French. The loaves of

sugar that I saw bore on the wrappers the name of a Marseilles firm, and, what was strange, a stamp or trade-mark with the arms of England. Apricots, plums, and grapes, with other varieties of fruit, were offered in large quantities, and, what could hardly be expected here, ice can be bought in any quantity at a very reasonable price. During the winter the cold is severe, and the inhabitants pour water, during the frosts, into large shallow tanks, afterwards removing the ice and storing it in deep cellars for summer use. This display of foresight is entirely out of keeping with the usual character of the Persians, but the luxury of ice in such a climate can only be appreciated by one who has felt its excessive summer heat. From noon till four in the afternoon outdoor movement was quite impossible, and, only for the furious west winds which set in at about the former hour, even life within doors would be hardly endurable. The swarms of flies add to the traveller's discomfort, and very large whitish green scorpions abound, stowing themselves in one's valise or in any garment laid carelessly aside for a few hours. Fortunately, mosquitoes are absent, but the flies and scorpions are quite enough. Taking it altogether, Sabzavar offers few inducements for a prolonged residence. It is dusty and burnt up in appearance, looking very like an immense brickyard. The houses, with their flat cupolas, from the top of each of which the smoke issues through a round hole, resemble so many brick-kilns, and the few trees that peep above the garden walls only intensify the dried-up appearance of the whole place. The sun beats in summer on the roofs and exposed parts of the streets with terrific strength, and on one occasion when I incautiously rushed out in my bare feet on the pavement at midday to recover some papers which a sudden gust of wind had swept off, I thought literally that my soles would be burned before I could get

back to shelter. The town has evidently suffered a good deal from recent wars. The eastern gate has been battered with artillery, and the massive oaken valves are literally riddled with cannon shot. Though the people said that this damage had been caused by the Turcomans, I do not believe it was, as the Tekké nomads in their forays could hardly drag twelve-pounder field guns with them, and least of all over such a range of hills as I since crossed. Most likely the town rebelled and was attacked by the Shah's troops, or some local chieftains may have been the assailants.

At Sabzavar I parted company with the pilgrims, as the road which I had decided on taking to Kuchan left the Meshed road there. I separated from the pilgrims without regret. The greater portion of them having started on their expedition without any funds, had to depend on begging for the means of living, and so persistently did they ply their trade as to be a perfect nuisance on the road. Everyone who seemed to possess anything was remorselessly dunned for alms. A favourite practice was to assail me for money to replace the road-tattered sandals, which footsore pilgrims offered for my inspection so frequently that at last I was compelled to explain to them that I had not got a contract to provide the caravan with shoe leather.

It proved easier to separate from my travelling companions than to pursue my journey to Kuchan. It was needful in the first place to call on the Governor, and discuss my projected journey, and the precautions necessary to make it safely. The people of this part of Persia are terribly in awe of their marauding neighbours, and a journey to a place so near the Turcoman frontier as Kuchan was looked upon as a most perilous if not wholly insane undertaking. Half a dozen Turcomans are enough to cause a panic in a Persian community, and a Turcoman venturing alone into

a Persian town would be killed at once as remorselessly as a venomous snake. To make my call on the Governor with due formality, I sent a messenger to announce my intended visit—an indispensable ceremony here, when the person to be visited is of any considerable rank. This preliminary over, I proceeded to that dignitary's residence, which, though fortified with flanking towers and bastions, was only built of earth. The guards at the gate seemed utterly astonished at my appearance, and I heard them speculating on my nationality. One decided that I was either a Russian or a Frenchman. The latter nationality he spoke of by the word Françés, not Ferenghi, the common Oriental word for all Europeans except Russians, who go by the title of Uroos. I know not how the speaker got his knowledge of the French in particular, as Persians in general are not much acquainted with geography. Perhaps the trade of Marseilles with Sabzavar has familiarised the people of the latter place with the name at least of the Gallic nation. Passing the gateway and its guardians, I found myself in a bare courtyard with some dusty buildings on the far side. About a dozen persons belonging to the household were saying the evening prayer on a slightly raised platform in one corner. On the left was a one-story building with folding windows, paper instead of glass being inserted in the openings in the sash. In front was a large tank of water full of weeds. A small side door gave access to a large court, containing some trees of mulberry, jujube, and willow, and partially paved. A number of the hangers-on, who are always to be found around the dwelling of a Persian grandee, loitered about the gateway. Immediately on my entry a carpet was brought and spread beside the tank, and two arm-chairs were placed on it, in one of which I was invited to take a seat.

The Governor, or Neyer el Dowlet, soon made his

appearance. He was a handsome, sly-looking man of about forty, with large eyes, a slender aquiline nose, and a long drooping moustache of a heavy leaden black colour. His dress consisted of a long loose robe of lilac-coloured silk, and he wore the usual Kadjar hat of Astrakan. Like most Persians of the upper class, he was extremely courteous in his manners. I presented my letters from his Highness the Sipah Salar Aazem, and from the Shah's physician, Dr. Tholozan. Our conversation at first turned on the Europeans who had been in those parts during recent times, and I quickly found that I was the first newspaper correspondent who had come to the country. The Governor could not comprehend my mission very clearly, and still less could he understand why I should wish to risk my life and liberty among the Turcomans. The letters I had shown evidently convinced him that I was not in the Government service, and he clearly set the whole undertaking down as a mere freak of Western eccentricity. He spoke of Colonel Valentine Baker and Captain Napier, but he had seen neither of them, as the former, when in Sabzavar, had not called on him, and the Governor himself was absent at the time of Captain Napier's visit. I then drew the conversation to the Akhal Tekkés, and inquired what reception I was likely to meet among them. The Governor shook his head. The road across the mountains, he said, was pretty safe for armed persons travelling in company, as the governors along the Atterek kept strict watch against marauding parties from beyond the frontier and took heavy reprisals in case of damage to persons or property within the Persian territory, but the Tekkés were a bad lot. The Governor of Kuchan and Yar Mehemet Khan of Budjnoord would be able to give me more accurate information about them than he could. This Yar Mehemet Khan has been quite a prominent personage since the commencement of the Russian

campaign on the Atterek, and occupies a position similar to that of one of the Lords Warden of the old Scottish marches in the days of the Tudors. It was while returning from a mission to him, with the object of obtaining supplies of forage to be delivered at Chatte and different points along the line of march, that General Lazareff's envoy, Zeinel Beg, and the Russian soldiers were waylaid and massacred by the Turcomans. There had always been marauders along the road to Kuchan, the Governor told me, but at that time they were not very much to be feared. He offered me an escort, but as I knew that this involved a heavy payment to the guard, I politely declined to accept it, trusting rather to my own revolver and sword and to the formidable appearance of my servant, who was fully accoutred with sabre, handjar, and pistols. He next questioned me on the possibilities of a war between Russia and China on the Kuldja question, and was delighted when I gave him the contents of a leading article from a copy of the 'Pall Mall Budget,' which I had brought from Teheran. He was surprised to learn that the British were to evacuate Candahar and Afghanistan as soon as possible, neither could he clearly understand why the Persian expedition to Herat had been abandoned. He was a little disappointed that my news should be some months old, for the people in these out-of-the-way regions apparently think that a travelling European carries a portable telegraph in his portmanteau, and thus keeps himself fully acquainted with everything going on throughout the world. Some words which the Governor let drop during the conversation were suggestive of the Turcomans getting drawn into the war in Afghanistan, as Abdul Rahman Khan had a very large force of Tekké refugees with him.

Two glasses of very strong tea, sweetened excessively, were brought in at the commencement of our conversation, and

immediately afterwards two highly ornamented water-pipes, which we smoked in silence for a few minutes. Two more glasses of tea were subsequently brought. This tea and smoking interlude, apart from the question of hospitality, has an important *rôle* in serious conversations in Persia. The Orientals are born diplomatists, and the smoking of a pipe or sipping of a glass of tea is often employed to gain time for deliberation when questions of possible importance are unexpectedly started. Little things of this kind, like palace influence and harem intrigues, play a much more important part in the East than the less subtle minds of Europe can well imagine. I recollect once when calling on Ghazi Achmet Mukhtar Pasha, the well-known Turkish General of the Armenian campaigns, at Constantinople, after a few minutes' conversation he rose, and, pleading weakness of the eyes as an excuse, changed his seat so as to sit with his back to the light. This is a common manœuvre to hide the expression of one's face, and at the same time have a clear view of the countenance of the other party to the conversation. After some time I took leave of the Governor, promising to call on him again before my departure. Our parting was marked with all due formality. We rose and bowed profoundly to each other, and I then retired backwards, keeping an eye on the tank, and at ten paces from the carpet I bowed again and departed.

After my interview with the Governor, I intended starting as soon as possible for Kuchan, but was delayed by the difficulty of finding a guide. The first whom I engaged in that capacity lost his courage when it came to the moment of setting out, and declined to go unless I would ask for an escort. It cost me a couple of days to find another guide, and thus my stay in Sabzavar was prolonged until July 18, eight days in all. On the evening before starting I paid my visit of adieu to the Governor, and before

sunrise rode through the bazaar as the people were unbarring their booths, on my way to the gate of the town. The tenants of the booths gazed after me with an air of astonishment, and evidently looked on my project of penetrating among the Tekké savages, which had got well published everywhere during my stay, as little less than lunacy. The last person to whom I spoke in Sabzavar, oddly enough, happened to be a man who had spent nine years in London as a servant of the Persian Envoy. His impressions, and the tastes he had acquired during his travels, were peculiar. He would like, he said, to return once more for the sake of eating corned beef and drinking bitter ale. He also had been highly pleased by the manner in which Madame Patti had danced the cancan at the Alhambra in Leicester Square!

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FROM SABZAVAR TO KUCHAN.

Exhausted lands—Grapes and wine—Aliak—Reformed thieves—Writing under difficulties—Sultanabad—Antiquated farm implements—Saman fodder—Water-melons—Mineral resources—Karagul—Sympathy with Russia—Persian highwaymen—Abdullah Gau—Kuchan—The Upper Atterek—Weighing the chances—Russians and Turcomans—Anxieties—Railroad—Earthquakes—Dinner with a Persian Emir—A frontier court—Dinner-table on the frontier—Social fencing—Persian zakouska—Family etiquette—A renegade—Western luxuries—A Kurdish orgie—A young captive—Eastern immorality—Going home—Bitten by the *shab-gee*—Fever and delirium—A friend in need—A desperate remedy—Opium dreams—Recovery—Kuchan medical astrologers.

THE sun was rising as I rode out of Sabzavar, for, being now travelling independently, I was no longer under the necessity of spending the morning hours in the inaction to which they had been doomed during the time that I accompanied the pilgrims. The road to Kuchan runs in a north-easterly direction, winding in conformity with the outline of the neighbouring chain of hills, but level itself. The valley through which it runs is wide and extensively cultivated, but, owing to the defective system of agriculture employed, the crops were very poor, the corn stalks being hardly a foot high and the ears thin. Water is plentiful, both in running streams and artificial ponds, and the dried-up watercourses indicate that in winter there must be a still more abundant supply. A village, Aliar, about seven miles from Sabzavar, is surrounded by mulberry plantations, which furnish food for the silkworms. Im-

mediately beyond Aliar the road enters a district of dry and barren hills, principally formed of schistose and other metamorphic rocks, crossed occasionally by vast intrusive trap dykes which stand out from the slopes and summits black and glistening in the sun with an almost metallic lustre. In a few secluded gullies and nooks there are streaks and patches of verdure in the shape of tall rank grass, amid which apricot and mulberry trees with extraordinarily large leaves rise here and there. A half-wild vine, with dense clusters of very small grapes red in colour, grows among the rocks. The inhabitants make a very poor kind of wine, in colour somewhat like tea, and of a disagreeable burned flavour, from these grapes. They also make a liquor, which they call arrack, from the plums growing in the neighbourhood, and this they consume extensively, though they are very rigid Mahomedans—Shiites of course.

The road wound in and out among the hills for about fifteen miles, after which the valleys began to open out into plains dotted with hills a few hundred feet high. The road was entirely deserted. I did not meet half a dozen persons during the whole ride from Aliar. Three of these were men driving asses laden with raw cotton, still uncleaned. Silk and cotton seem to be the chief products of the country. About eight miles further I came to Aliak, a little hamlet of thirty houses huddled together on a small hill in the very heart of the mountains. The people of this place had formerly the name of being great highway robbers, but when I passed they seemed peaceable enough, and received me very hospitably, evidently taking me for a Russian from the expeditionary force beyond the Atterek (Monah is the name it bears in this neighbourhood). About half the male population were sitting under a great plane-tree in the centre of the village. When I spoke of the Turcomans

they cursed them heartily, and expressed the hope that they might be thoroughly dealt with this time. Fifteen miles beyond Aliak I reached my stopping-placé for the night, Sultanabad—a small but strongly fortified village, the surrounding hills being also furnished with watch-towers, from which beacon fires could readily announce the approach of an enemy. There was a caravanserai, but entirely deserted, as the track is little travelled over. I established my quarters in a large dilapidated room on the ground-floor, and, having stuck my sword in the wall, and hung the linen Chinese lantern I carried with me to give light at night on the hilt, I spread a horsecloth on the floor, and, lying on my face thereon, proceeded to write my correspondence. Every now and then I had to cast a look around to guard against the advance of the various insect tribes—beetles, spiders, ants, and others—which came in columns towards my light, and constantly sought to climb on my carpet and investigate the contents of the ink-bottle.

At daybreak I started from Sultanabad, and crossed a valley, some eight miles wide and sixteen long, where the inhabitants were busily engaged in reaping and gathering the grain from their corn-fields. The processes they used were decidedly Homeric. They often first cut off the ears and then reaped the straw with small, old-fashioned sickles, such as are represented on antique vases. The corn was chiefly barley, which in some places was being threshed out by the primitive process of treading with oxen. The straw is collected as carefully as the grain, as it forms the staple fodder of the country. The peasants spread it out on a beaten earthen floor, and a kind of car, resting on two trunks of trees, armed with projecting spikes of wood about three inches long, is dragged repeatedly over it by bullocks. The straw is thus chopped into short pieces a couple of inches

long, in which state, under the name of *saman*, it is given to horses instead of hay. In the neighbourhood of Erzeroum a heavy plank, the under-side studded with sharp fragments of flint or obsidian, is used instead of the car with a similar result. Fifteen or twenty pounds of this *saman* is a day's ration for a horse. The animals seem to thrive on it, and will quit the freshest hay for a nose-bag of it.

Water-melon patches occur frequently in this vicinity, being irrigated from the *kanots* or covered ditches brought a long distance from the hills. The melon attains great perfection here, and, indeed, with proper appliances for irrigation, the entire valley, though now for the greater part desert or merely dotted at best with clumps of rough grass or beds of wild thyme, would be capable of the highest cultivation. The same may be said of the greatest part of Northern Persia, but the constant inroads of the Turcomans have hitherto effectually prevented the development of the natural resources of the country. Near the eastern edge of the plain are the ruins of a considerable town, among the dismantled towers and houses of which a shepherd was leading his sheep to graze. The large village of Kheirabad stands about a mile further north, and there I had purposed halting for breakfast, but as the people could not furnish me with forage for my horses, I had to continue my route fasting, and soon got among arid hills from which the glare of the sun was reflected oppressively. The rocks of which these hills are formed are chiefly limestone and gypsum mixed with rotten black shale in highly distorted beds. At a distance this shale closely resembles coal, and the shining greasy-looking grey stone which occurs in connection with it is so like the roofs and floors of the coal beds that it heightens the delusion. Though I was too tired and hungry to make more than a superficial

examination, I saw enough during my three hours' ride through these hills to convince me that proper exploration would discover numerous mineral veins in this locality. I picked up several specimens of copper ore, hæmatite, and brown oxide of iron. Beyond the hills came a narrow winding valley, well watered and cultivated, where the inhabitants were busy getting in their harvest. The yield seemed to be very large in proportion to the population. A good deal of it, probably, would find its way across the Atterek to the Russian army. There was abundant promise that a good crop of cereals would be forthcoming in this part of Persia. I passed numerous fortified villages perched on low hills flanking the valley; but, the inhabitants being away in the fields, or under tents with their herds on the mountains, I could find no one to whom to address myself. At length, after a weary ride, I reached the village of Karagul, where I succeeded in unearthing three witch-like old women, who were down in a cellar, engaged in boiling something in a pot. They must have taken me for a Turcoman, for on my appearance they fled away into inner recesses, from which they were only with difficulty induced to come forth. Through their agency some men were discovered, and I was able to get some breakfast —eggs, milk, and a fowl, as usual. I had had such a surfeit of these articles during a long period, that for this reason alone I looked forward with pleasure to getting into other regions. As soon as my arrival was made known, the entire population of the district left their work, and flocked in to 'interview' me. They spoke a curious mixture of Persian and Turcoman, a jargon with which I was tolerably well acquainted, in consequence of my sojourn on the frontier. They all took me to be a Russian, owing to my wearing a white tunic and cap, and were loud in their expressions of hope that ere long my friends would overcome

the common adversary. I took particular care to register these expressions of opinion of the border inhabitants, as there would possibly be no other means by which their ideas could reach Europe. Up to that time, so far as I had been able to observe, they had looked upon the Russians as their friends, inasmuch as the latter had given them considerable respite from the persecution which, during centuries, they had suffered at the hands of the border raiders. Of course these frontier Persians are as a rule too ignorant to be able to judge of the future possibilities awaiting them, and their sources of information are also too limited to allow of their doing so. They know the Russians as folk who, whether intentionally or otherwise, have wrought them a great deal of good, and shielded them from evils which their own Government had shown itself impotent to prevent. A Russian army marching through these districts would be received with open arms, and, as the Russians generally pay well for what they get or take, would be welcomed a second time. I have no hesitation in saying that, among the masses on the North Persian frontier, Russian influence is predominant. Perhaps I might add, deservedly so, as far as the people are concerned. With regard to the political aspect of the matter, so far as my observations have gone, the Persian Government is delighted to have some one to rid it of a very disagreeable neighbour, by whose interference its frontier populations are allowed to follow their avocations in peace, and who, sooner or later, may bring about a situation in which, during a dispute, a peaceable neighbour like Persia may receive a good portion of the fruits of a possible strife. Persia approximates singularly to Austria, not only in employing the officers of that Power to organise her army, but also in adopting the peculiar waiting policy so characteristic of Vienna statesmen. I am afraid that the only result of this doubtless long-

sighted policy will be a further lease of beggarly independence, based on the mutual disagreements of surrounding peoples too strong to be in accord.

The valleys in the mountain chain through which I passed are inhabited by a race which until lately was little less given to marauding than the Tekkés themselves, who habitually swept through the passes on their forays. The villagers regarded lonely parties of travellers or even an inadequately guarded caravan as natural prey. During the last few years, however, the wise and energetic measures of the Persian Minister Sipah Salar Aazem have secured life and property comparatively well within the frontiers. The head man of Karagul, a tall old man whose long beard was dyed with henna to the colour of a fox's back, became very friendly with me, after examining in succession my field glass, revolver, sketch-book, &c. He advised me not to go through the Abdulla Gau Pass, as all the people there were '*shumsheer adamlar*,' fond of the sword. He then pointed out a very high mountain, the top of which was shaped like a bishop's mitre, and recommended me to pass through the cleft between the twin peaks. However, I had had enough of mountain climbing already, and so preferred to risk the dangers of the road as it lay before me. Still, I was so impressed by the warnings he gave me that I determined not to pass through the village of Abdulla Gau by night, and accordingly I and my servant and guide camped out on a steep rock near that place and kept watch by turns all night. In the morning we boldly entered the suspected village, and found the people a sober-looking lot enough. One of them offered me some fine turquoises, from the mines of that gem on the mountains of Madane, at a very low price. Though much tempted to buy, I feared the offer might be a *ruse* to find out how much money I had, and I declined traffic. Beyond Abdulla Gau the valley narrowed

considerably, but was highly cultivated throughout its whole extent. After a couple of miles this valley widened out into a plain, also well cultivated. The road then led over a steep and stony mountain, on the north-easterly side of which we descended into the wide tract where the Keshef Rood has its source. Villages were numerous, sometimes half a dozen being grouped together with only a couple of hundred yards between them. Before us, inclosed in far-extending groves of chenar and mulberry, was Kuchan, and beyond rose the blue chain of the Akhal Tekké mountains, whither my course was directed. After seeing the Atterek at its mouth and following its course many a mile through the Steppes, I had now reached the proximity of its source. At first I thought Kuchan was a place of some size, from the extent of the gardens around it, but a near approach undeceived me. Except the bazaar and a ruined mosque, all the buildings and walls were of earth. As I rode through the former the tradesmen looked up from their work to stare at the unwonted sight of a European, and even the women forgot to draw their veils in their curiosity to see a Ferenghi. There were many strangers in the place, and among them several from Candahar and Cabul, including three chiefs, one of whom told me he had been present when the Residency was stormed. The caravanserai was about sixty yards square, the stables being on the ground-floor and the lodging for travellers above, with a balcony about ten feet above the soil to give access. I stowed myself and luggage in the den allotted to me, and attempted some writing, but was disturbed by a sudden invasion of winged cockroaches, evidently drawn by my candlelight. These intruders resemble the common 'black clocks' of our coal-cellars at home, but fly quite actively. Small carnivorous beetles came in thousands during the night and effectually prevented sleep. During

the day the beetles disappear, but only to be replaced by clouds of flies, scarcely less annoying in their way.

Kuchan being an important point on the frontier, I had to spend some days there to prepare for the most perilous part of my journey, the expedition among the Turcomans. I wanted some information from the Governor, who rejoiced in the high-sounding title of the Shudja-ed-Dowlet Emir Hussein Khan, but that dignitary at the date of my arrival was absent on a pilgrimage to Meshed, though expected home at any hour. I utilised the delay to explore the surroundings of Kuchan. The Atterek river flows nearly a mile to the north of the town, and the slopes leading down to its banks are covered with vineyards, the grapes being extensively used for the production of wine and arrack. The river is here about twenty-five feet wide and only a few inches deep, with very gently sloping banks and an all but imperceptible current. The water has no trace of the saline matter which is found in the river lower down at Chatte. A rude bridge of brick crosses it, the marks on the piers of which indicate a rise of three or four feet at least during the winter floods. Sitting on the ruined parapet of this bridge, I mused on the chances of my ever recrossing it, once I should make my final start for the Akhal Tekké, and I remained so long absorbed in my thoughts that my servant at last touched my elbow, thinking I was asleep, and reminded me of the approach of evening.

My purpose was to push on to Askabad in the heart of the Akhal Tekké country, and about eighty miles or more from Kuchan, beyond the mountain range which rose some nine or ten thousand feet straight before me. I was subsequently compelled by circumstances to change this plan, but at the time I am writing of I expected to find myself in a few days amongst the dreaded nomads. I hardly knew

how I could keep up my communications with the civilised world across these savage mountains, as there seemed to be no intercourse at this place between the Persians and any tribe of Turcomans. I had not seen one of the colossal hats of the latter anywhere in the bazaar, though at Asterabad they could be reckoned by dozens. Besides, I was quite uncertain what reception I should meet among the Tekkés in their own country. Should I fall into the hands of any of the roving bands of marauders usually to be met with I was pretty sure to be carried off *nolens volens* either to Merv or somewhere else, and there kept until I could procure a respectable ransom. If, on the other hand, I should run across the advancing Russians, I was certain of being sent under escort to my old quarters at Tchikislar and thence shipped across the Caspian to Baku. Between the Turcoman Scylla and the Russian Charybdis my course promised to be a difficult one, and I might well ponder its chances as I sat on the Kuchan bridge wall.

With better government and well-directed energy the country around Kuchan might be made one of the richest parts of Persia. The roads to Meshed, Sabzavar, and the main road to Teheran could be made excellent ones at a trifling cost. There is also a pass near Abasabad by which a railroad could easily be built from Sabzavar to the capital, and the traffic would be large even from the outset if one may judge by the numerous camel trains and troops of horses and donkeys which are constantly passing backwards and forwards laden with silk, cotton, iron, and other goods. The very large number of pilgrims, too, would swell the traffic, and even tax to the utmost the carrying capacities of a Meshed-Teheran railroad. At present the means of communication with the outside world are wretched. The postal service does not extend north of the high road from Teheran to Meshed, and to send a letter or telegram

from Kuchan one has to ride nearly a hundred miles over very unsafe roads or else send a special courier the same distance. Still, the investment of European capital in Persian railroads could not be recommended as long as the present state of insecurity continues along the frontier, however great the resources of the country. I met one European during my stay in Kuchan. He was a curious character, some twenty-five years of age, with blue eyes and long yellow hair. He spoke Russian and German, but no other European language. though he said he was half French and half German. He had recently embraced Mahomedanism, and moreover he told me he was a Nihilist, but he would not tell the motives which had brought him to Kuchan. The people there set him down as a lunatic, and I have little doubt that they included me in the same category. A sharp shock of earthquake occurred the evening after my arrival, and I learned that such are quite common and sometimes very violent. The town was completely ruined by one about twenty-five years ago.

The Governor returned on the third day after my arrival. He despatched his chamberlain, an elderly and dignified personage, bearing a silver mace as the badge of his office, to notify me of the fact, and to invite me to dinner. Evening was falling as, accompanied by my two servants, I proceeded to the Emir's palace. The straggling booths of the bazaar were closed, and we stumbled through its narrow alleys in the dark as best we could, for the branch roofs overhead completely excluded even the twilight that remained in the sky. Dogs and huge rats scurried away at the sound of our approach, and more than once my guide had to lead me like a blind man through the labyrinth of holes and ditches of dirty water, a common feature of Eastern towns. The Emir's palace has a large open space in front. The main entrance was in the form of a horse-

shoe arch built of red brick, while the walls around were only mud structures. Squatting on the ground around were nearly a hundred people, many of them Turcomans. They were persons who had requests to make of, or petitions to present to, the Governor of Kuchan. Within the groined arch inside the horseshoe gate was a guard of men-at-arms. As I stepped into the guard-room I was met by the chamberlain, who, dismissing the crowd of unfortunate applicants, immediately ushered me into a courtyard measuring some fifty feet square. Passing by a doorway at the further side, I entered a still larger court, paved with square tiles, in the midst of which stood a large rectangular reservoir of water, in the centre of which played a fountain. Arranged in the middle of the pavement were flower-beds, planted entirely with the 'marvel of Peru,' that sweet-scented flower which opens its blossom to the sunset, and fills the night air with its perfume. It is a favourite with the Persians, whose banquets always take place after sundown. The scene which met my eyes was extraordinary. Ranged round the large courtyard were at least a hundred candles, burning in the peculiar candlesticks which Russia has made familiar to this part of the frontier. The candle, buried in the body of the candlestick, was forced gradually upwards by a helical spring, as in ordinary carriage lamps, the flame being protected from the wind by a tulip-shaped bell-glass. Shaded candles of the same description were placed around the border of the tank, between which and the main entrance of the Emir's residence a long table, draped in white linen, was laid out *à la Franca*. On the table burned half a dozen candle-lamps.

At some distance from and at right angles to the table was a long-backed wooden bench. Sitting upon this, and attired in sober broadcloth robes, reaching to their

heels, were a dozen individuals—brothers and cousins of the Emir, Hussein Khan, and who had been invited to do honour to his guest. A silver-mounted water-pipe, the head set with turquoises and emeralds, was passed from hand to hand. I took my place, as invited, at the right hand of the Governor, and we entered into the usual pointless conversation so characteristic of Eastern intercourse. We spoke of anything and everything except that which was nearest to our hearts or had reference to the situation. It was a kind of social fencing, for the Emir was not at all sure that I was what I represented myself to be, only a traveller, trying to gather information about these far-off lands, and not an envoy who had been despatched to enquire deftly into the particular policy which he might have adopted in view of the then critical situation. A servant brought in a silver tray, upon which were large glasses of the abominable spirit called arrack, each of which was supposed to be emptied at a draught. This tray was handed round with a frequency which led me strongly to doubt the orthodoxy of my Kurd host. The whole proceeding was consistent with what I had hitherto seen of before-dinner practices in the East.

We were all slightly stimulated before a move was made towards the dinner table. When the Emir stood up, his kinsmen rose to their feet, and drew themselves up in line, each looking the very personification of humility—their feet close together, their toes turned in, each hand thrust up the opposite sleeve, and each head slightly reclining upon the right shoulder. The Emir walked up and down the paved enclosure, talking rather wildly. He spoke of his friend Dr. Tholozan, the Shah's physician, who had kindly given me a letter of introduction to him. He stated that that gentleman had marvellously cured him of a malady of long standing, and went so far as to say that

even Persian medical men could not pretend to the amount of science which the Frankish doctor commanded.

The Kurd governors of the frontier, military commandants of the colonies founded by Shah Abass the Great, and by his still greater successor the usurper Nadir Shah, have never been considered as thoroughly identified with the Persian kingdom. The manners and customs of these communities differ exceedingly from those of their more southern brethren, and on the whole, wild though they are in some respects, are in many ways immensely superior to those of the latter. Among the peculiarities borrowed from the Persians which I noted, was the intense reverence paid by the younger scions to the chief of the family, altogether apart from his political position. While the relatives stood in a row, the Emir marched up to the table. Taking a handful of sweetmeats from a dish, he distributed them to his submissive-looking kinsfolk, each of whom held both hands extended at arms' length, and close together, as though he expected to receive a donation of small-shot or quicksilver, and bowed low in acknowledgment of the high compliment paid to him. Then we made a move to the dinner table, which was spread in the middle of the court-yard. For a wonder, there were chairs and benches, with which the immediate relations of the Emir and myself were accommodated. The remainder of the party, some thirty in number, sat upon long wooden forms. The table, a long one, was draped in faultlessly white cloth. In its midst was a great silver centre-piece, loaded with roses, and flanked on either side by a complete set of ornaments, including vases of opaline glass, decorated on the outside with gilt and ruby beads. These were Russian presents. The Emir supposed that the vases were goblets, and more than once in the course of the dinner they were filled with wine on the occasion of the different toasts which were drunk.

The ceremonies were marshalled by a person to whom I have already had occasion to allude. He was of mixed race; his father being French, his mother German. From his earliest years he had lived in Russia, and his education, such as it was, he told me had been received at the University of Moscow. According to his own statement, he had been banished from Baku, on the western shores of the Caspian Sea, for political reasons. He had thrown in his lot with the Mussulman populations of Central Asia, and had embraced Islam at the shrine of Imam Riza. He had been in dire want, and found the *pilaff*, which was distributed gratuitously at the tomb of the saint, acceptable. He subsequently became a tutor in the family of the Prince Governor of Meshed, and afterwards a kind of hanger-on at the court of the Emir of Kuchan. His nominal position was that of a teacher of French; his actual one I was not able to fathom at the moment, though it was sufficiently made known to me later on. He was called, in the French tongue, Charles Dufour; in the language of his newly-adopted country, Ali Islam. During the dinner he constantly went to and fro between the kitchen and the table, ordering up soups and dishes as occasion required.

The *table d'hôte* was an unusual one. The candles flared around the courtyard, their lights glancing in the great reservoir. The air was heavy with the scent of the flowers. Around us were the ruins of the old palace, destroyed by an earthquake twenty years previously. The Kurdish Governor sat at the head of the table. I sat opposite to him. On either side were the colossal forms, gleaming eyes, and sombre robes of his relations. Before we commenced to dine, arrack was again served round. After each glass one took from a dish a kind of acid paste, the Kurdish name for which I have forgotten, and then very fair Bordeaux wine was served. This I took

to be an imitation of the Russian *zakouska*, which the frontier Kurds have probably borrowed from the soldiers of the expedition. Then there were roasted almonds and pistaches. While we were disposing of this pre-prandial repast, I remarked to the Emir that in Turkey we always drank mastic on such occasions. 'I know it well,' exclaimed he; 'did you bring any with you?' And he leaned eagerly across the table. 'I am sorry to say that I did not,' I replied; 'but if your Excellency wishes I shall take the earliest opportunity of forwarding you some from Constantinople when I get back there.' We had soup, and dishes *ab libitum*; and I could never have believed that the human frame was capable of absorbing such an amount of nutrition if I had not seen these Kurds eat. We were supplied with the excellent dry white wine of the country, and Château Margaux. The latter must have been brought at an enormous expense from Europe. It was probably a present from the expeditionary generals beyond the frontier.

Towards the close of the banquet, my host and his guests became rather excited by the alcoholic beverages which they were consuming with a will. They talked at random, and spoke of their exploits in the field against the Tekké Turcomans. Later they fell to embracing each other in a more than brotherly fashion. I was sitting opposite the Emir's brother, and had got so far as making a pun, in the Kurdish language, about mushrooms, of which we were partaking at the moment, when the opposite form was suddenly upset, and Emir, chiefs, and generals rolled upon the pavement, locked in each others' embraces. They kissed each other with fervour, swore undying devotion, and seemed in no wise inclined to resume their positions at table. At this juncture a side door opened, and a boy of nine or ten years was brought in by some attendants. He was a Turcoman child, and had been captured six months

previously during one of the *razzias* which were of every-day occurrence on this frontier. His long, light-brown hair hung upon his shoulders, and his light grey eye showed that he was not of Persian birth. The Emir, who by this time had picked himself up, explained to me that this was his favourite captive. He took him on his knee and kissed him, and he was then passed round to all of us. When he came to me he shrank away, muttering the word 'Kaffir!' In the East two epithets are applied to non-Mussulmans, Kaffir and Giaour. 'Giaour' means simply a Christian, or, speaking generally, a non-Mussulman deist of some kind. 'Kaffir' is the more objectionable epithet, and signifies an unbeliever, or pagan. The poor little Turcoman child who shrank from me as 'Kaffir' was retained by the Emir for purposes which it would not beseem me to mention in detail.

Towards midnight wild confusion ensued. The greater number of the party were sprawling over the tiled courtyard, the cousins swearing eternal love and fidelity to each other, and indulging in unseemly embraces. The Emir himself pretended to have need of exercise, and was promenaded from one end of the space to the other, a servant holding him under each arm—his feet in front, his whole body making an angle of forty-five degrees with the horizon. Suddenly he recollected himself, and, sitting upon a chair, asked, solemnly, 'Has the Ingleez gone home yet?' He evidently believed that, before proceeding further with his orgies, objectionable witnesses should be got rid of. I took the hint, rose, and, exchanging salutes as well as I could with the prostrate company, made for the door. The mace-bearer marched before me, accompanied by four men bearing lanterns, such as can only be seen in this part of the world. They were nearly as large as the bass drum of a military band, and were made of waxed linen, closing up

like a concertina when not in use. The bigger the lanterns, the greater is supposed to be the dignity of the individual whom they precede.

We stumbled through the narrow, dark passages of the bazaar, and when I had thrown myself upon the leopard-skin stretched upon the floor of the caravanserai, I jotted down the notes from which I have written this description.

An illness of three weeks' duration followed the Emir's banquet. After returning to my earth-walled chamber, and trying to sleep as best I could, for I was very tired, I took none of the usual precautions against the *shab-gez*. At four o'clock in the morning my arms and legs were covered with the tumid bodies of these pests. Two days later, virulent-looking pustules marked the bitten spots. I had felt inclined to doubt what had been told me in regard to the sting of these ferocious insects, but later experience proved how mistaken I had been. A high fever resulted. It had typhoid symptoms, all of which were aggravated by the foul air of the caravanserai, the bad food and water, and the anxiety of mind about my coming journey. For two days and nights I was delirious. In a lucid moment I discovered that I was suffering from one of the most dangerous complications of typhoid enteric disease. No one who has not been similarly circumstanced can imagine my critical position. Here I was, in a semi-barbarous town, with no one near who had the slightest idea of the nature of my malady, no medicine, no doctor. Had it not been for the intelligent devotion of a friend, a Tekké sheep-skin merchant, I do not believe that I should now be alive. He sat by me during my delirium, applied ice to my head, and was the only one who understood me when I asked for camphor, the sole available drug. There was a moment when the enteric irritation was so severe that I felt convinced my last hour had arrived. I made up my mind to try

a desperate remedy, and sent for opium. I took what for me, who had never tasted the drug before, was an enormous dose—a piece as large as the first joint of one's little finger. The effect was magical so far as the pain was concerned, and I then lost consciousness for nearly forty-eight hours. For once I can write the 'Confessions of an Opium-eater,' and I must say that my experiences of the visions conjured up would scarcely tempt me into a De Quincey's career. First I became chairman of a Russian Nihilistic society; then I was transformed into a black goat pursued by panthers on the mountains; then I was a raging torrent, dashing away to some terrible end; and then I remember no more. I woke with an intense feeling of dread and horror, and half a day passed before I could recognise the faces around me. When my senses were a little collected, I asked for some arrack, the odious, poisonous stuff to be had at Kuchan; but it was the only stimulant available. Diluting this with much water, I took it from time to time to combat the terrific opiatic reaction, and gradually I came back to my normal state. The pain was wonderfully relieved, but I was crushed and shattered like a broken bulrush. Then I gradually mended, little by little.

These personal details may not be very interesting to general readers, but they may perchance be of practical use to some one who may hereafter be placed in like desperate straits. Several would-be physicians wanted badly to prescribe for me, but as I knew that every one of them carried an astrolabe in his pocket, which would have to be consulted before he looked at my tongue, and also, in all probability, a brass basin in which to roast the fiend who had possession of me, I declined their aid with thanks.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### MILITARY AND POLITICAL SITUATION.

How news travels in the East—The Russian advance—The defence of Geok Tepé—Night in a Persian caravanserai—Persian singing—Persian servants—Scenes on the Upper Atterek—A house-top promenade—Interview with a Turcoman envoy—The Turcoman version of the course of hostilities—Russian tactics—A Turcoman poet—Modern weapons among the Nomads—Mussulman troops in the Russian service—The Daghestan cavalry—Vambéry on Russian intrigues—Shiites and Sunnites—Peculiar mercy to co-religionists—The telegraphic service—Iron posts *versus* wooden poles—Turcoman auxiliaries to Russia—The effect of the Afghan war on Central Asia—Turcoman hopes of British aid—Russian designs on India—The feeling of the Russian army—Letter to Makdum Kuli Khan—Persia and Russia—Benevolent neutrality of the Shah's Government—Russian courtesies to Persian officials—Understanding between Persia and Russia—Start for Meshed.

THE inaccuracy and exaggeration to which news is subject in the East, even when travelling a short distance, are truly marvellous. The intelligence brought by a courier from Askabad, to the effect that the Russian troops had attacked Geok Tepé in great force, and been repulsed with heavy loss, turned out to be based only upon a brisk skirmish between a reconnoitring party of Russian cavalry and a Turcoman patrol. In travelling about forty miles this intelligence had been magnified into the description of a general action. At the time, I felt a good deal surprised that the Russian expedition under the command of General Skobeleff should have undergone a reverse like that of the previous year, at the same spot, when the rashness of Lomakin hurled his utterly inadequate numbers against the

Turcoman ramparts. Without being actually on the ground, and witnessing things for one's self, there was no chance of learning the absolute truth. I had hoped to be close to the Tekké stronghold before that time, and very probably should have been, had I not been prevented from setting out by the desertion of two servants whom I had hired to accompany me. They were afraid to trust themselves among the Turcomans, and for the same reason I found it very difficult to replace them. Even after a careful selection of two new men, I was not by any means sure that they would not desert me at the last moment. I do not recollect ever having come in contact with one set of men so absolutely afraid of another as these border Persians are of the Turcomans. The warlike colony of Kurds planted along the Atterek from Budjnoord to Kelat-i-Nadri supplies the only borderers capable of holding their own against the Tekkés.

As far as my information went, the Russians were assembling at the head of the Akhal Tekké district, at the point where the road from Chatte debouches from the mountains near Bendessen. It was at the same place where the Russian army concentrated a portion of its forces preparatory to the disastrous advance to Geok Tepé under General Lomakin after Lazareff's death. How the whole affair broke down from want of sufficient transportation, coupled with the over-confidence of victory, is now too well known to need repeating. Taught by the experience, the Russians were advancing with caution, and establishing provision depôts and fortified posts sufficiently near to obviate the necessity of falling back on their base at the Caspian shore, even should failure again attend their efforts to capture the Tekké fortress. The Turcomans had swept the road clear of all supplies, and their tactics seemed to be to draw their enemies as far as possible from their bases at Tchikislar

and Chatte, to devastate the country before them, and then fight when the invaders should be reduced in strength by sickness, casualties, and the necessary detachment of parties to keep open the communications. The Russians, on the other hand, tried to counteract these attacks by advancing slowly, and establishing fortified posts along their line of advance of such strength, natural or artificial, as to require very small garrisons. In fact, after securing the line of communications by as few men as possible, so as to bring a large force to the front, the Russian object was to establish a second base of operations as near the scene of action as practicable, which would render the advanced corps independent, at least for a considerable time, of the more distant stations at Chatte and Tchikislar.

That all attempts at a compromise, if, indeed, any such had been made, had broken down, was evident from the attitude of the Turcomans. They abandoned the entire oasis up to Geok Tepé, and there concentrated the bulk of their fighting men. Reinforcements of Merv Turcomans came up at the same time. These Merv supports, however, were by no means so numerous as was stated. The force at Geok Tepé was estimated at about ten thousand men, the entire population being about forty thousand. In view, however, of the history of Russian aggression in Central Asia, and the ultimate victorious issues which invariably crowned their arms, I, for one, never doubted that the Turcomans would ere long yield or come to terms.

After some experience of Kuchan, and especially of its caravanserai, I felt the strongest desire to get away from it. Of all the wretched localities of this wretched East, it is one of the worst I have been in. To people at a distance, the petty miseries one undergoes in such a place may seem more laughable than otherwise; there they do not at all tend to excite hilarity in the sufferer. For four

days and nights at a stretch I did not enjoy ten minutes' unbroken rest. All day long one's hands were in perpetual motion, trying to defend one's face and neck against the pertinacious attacks of filthy blue-bottles, or brushing ants, beetles, and various other insects off one's hands and paper. With all this extra movement, each word I wrote occupied me very nearly a minute. Dinner involved a perpetual battle with creeping things, and was a misery that seldom tempted one's appetite. As for the time spent on the top of the house, lying on a mat, and which it would be a mockery to call bed-time, it would be difficult to say whether it or the daylight hours were the more fraught with torment. Every ten minutes it was necessary to follow the example of the people lying around, and to rise and shake the mat furiously, in order to get rid for a brief space of the crowds of gigantic black fleas which I could hear dancing round, and still more distinctly feel. The impossibility of repose, and the continued irritation produced by insects, brought on a kind of hectic fever which deprived me of all desire to eat. All night long three or four scores of donkeys brayed in chorus; vicious horses screamed and quarrelled, and hundreds of jackals and dogs rivalled each other in making night hideous. After sunset the human inhabitants of the caravanserai mounted to the roof, and sat there in scanty garments, smoking their *kaliouns*, and talking or singing until long after midnight. What Persian singing is—that, at any rate, of the class to which I allude—I will not attempt to describe. I will only say that it is not more conducive to sleep than are the bacchanalian shouts of a belated reveller in London, seeking his domicile. To these annoyances must be added the perpetual cheating, lying, and stealing of servants and attendants. In this respect one's own servants are the worst. They deem it a sacred duty to cheat their em-

ployer, and would feel ashamed if, at the end of the day, they could not boast of the amount of which they had relieved him. As long as a certain degree of impunity attends their peculation they may be passably civil; but the moment they are checked their insolence is unbounded, and you will be treated like a dog unless you take the initiative in that respect. Unless one is perpetually on the *qui vive* he will be robbed of all his moveables; his horses will be left uncleaned and will be defrauded of half their food, the servants and the fodder merchants being in accord to cheat, and divide the spoils between them. Such is the Persian domestic as I have known him—an exception having never come under my notice, and I have little doubt that the experience of most Europeans in this regard is the same. With the combination of annoyances which I have tried to describe, it need not be wondered at that I considered Kuchan unpleasant. The only tolerable part of one's existence there is for a little before and a little after sunset. A cool breeze sets in, the pests of the day have drawn off, and the night relays are not yet to the fore. The day noises have died away, and the jackals and dogs have not commenced their mutual salutations or recriminations. At that time it is delightful—doubly so from the contrast with the past sultry hours and the coming restless ones—to wander about the flat roofs that stretch around in acres, and gaze along the valley of the upper Atterek.

All around, scattered among the houses, were clumps of mulberry and white poplar, the pollard willows, with their luxuriant heads, resembling palmettos. Dark groves reached away to the river, whose murmur was heard from afar off. We heard the trickle and gush of the waters around, and were content to forget that they flowed through slimy gutters, and that many a dead dog and cat barred their passage. Toned down by the kindly hand of evening,

the mud houses lose their ugliness, and seem so many homes of quietness and peace, nestling in the midst of some vast garden. Like other Eastern towns, Kuchan, seen from without, is most deceptive, and at evening hours dons a disguise at sad variance with its repulsive interior. But the scenery of the valley, at this period of the day, is of surpassing beauty, and I have rarely beheld anything so lovely as the long ridges of the Akhal Tekké hills, succeeding each other in endless sequence, in varying tints of ashy grey, blue, and rose, till they die out in the golden haze where the sun has gone down. The rolling expanse of cornfield and pasture sleeps in tranquillity, and here and there the evening light glints on the waters of the Atterek, where the winding of that river brings it into view. Few could dream that so close by, across those fair-hued hills and waving cornfields, such dire carnage was preparing. As one walks about these housetops, he is surprised by the occurrence of the narrow streets of the bazaar, running like dark gashes through the masses of houses. For the greater portion of their length they are covered over with branches laid upon slight poles, reaching across the street so as to exclude the sun's rays. The abstracted star-gazer risks the sudden interruption of his perambulations by being transferred to the paving-stones below. Cats prowl about the housetops in surprising numbers, and large dogs gaze wistfully down the square openings, which serve as chimneys, into the evening *pilaff* pots of the dwellers, or at the long sticks of gratefully-smelling *kebab*. As the light fades away, people are to be seen laying out their beds on the various terraces; the gleams of the *kaliouns* show like giant fireflies, and the tip-tap of the police tambourine is to be heard signalling the closing of the shops. The *muezzim's* call rises on the night air, generally immediately followed by the prolonged howling of a couple of

dogs. This is the usual commencement of the nightly concert; and then adieu to rest, except for those whom long custom has rendered impervious alike to the hubbub, and to the bites of fleas and *shab-gez*.

While at Kuchan I had a most interesting interview with a Tekké Turcoman who had come direct from Geok Tepé, and had taken part in the cavalry skirmish at that place. He brought letters from Makdum Kuli Khan, the son of the late Noor Berdi Khan, who had succeeded to his father's position as recognised chief of the united Akhal Tekké tribes. It was quite an unusual thing to see a Turcoman of any description, much less a Tekké, at Kuchan, the nomads being quite as much afraid to venture into Kurdistan as the Persians are to trust themselves within the limits of the Akhal Tekké. This messenger was a fine specimen of his race. He was about twenty-five years of age, with piercing eye and well-cut aquiline nose, together with a mingled expression of resolution and mildness not every day to be found in the physiognomies of the Ishmaelites of this part of the world. He was but poorly dressed in coarse brown homespun wool, but his linen and white sheepskin cap were scrupulously clean. Immediately on arriving at Kuchan he had heard of the presence of an Englishman there, and had at once come to my caravanserai. According to the rules in force with regard to Turcomans, he was obliged to leave his sword and gun outside the town. A short ivory-handled knife, stuck in his white sash, was his only weapon.

The engagement, he said, took place a few miles to the north-west of Geok Tepé, near Kiariz. The Russian force consisted of four thousand cavalry, with four light guns, and was said to be under the immediate command of Skobeleff. The Tekkés, who were of equal strength, all cavalry, but without guns, were taken partly by surprise,

but after a brisk fight succeeded in driving off their assailants, who, my informant averred, lost twenty men in killed and wounded. He spoke in so modest and unassuming a manner, that I was inclined to attach every faith to what he said. His friends, he said, lost but ten men. Whether the Russian forces were a reconnoitring party, a foraging one, or both combined, he could not say. It was, probably, what in military parlance would be called a minor reconnaissance in force, made with a view of getting a close look at the enemy's works, and, if possible, of getting him to deploy all or the greater portion of his strength, by leading him to imagine that the attack was a real one. In operations like those of this Tekké campaign, a force of four thousand cavalry is quite enough to give reason to suppose that a large infantry detachment is behind it. Since the previous battle, nearly twelve months before, the entire district population, including women and children, had been incessantly engaged at the fortifications of Geok Tepé, completing and strengthening them. My informant said that the works were thoroughly finished, and that the Turcomans were sanguine of success in resisting the impending assault. The greater portion of the Russian army had crossed over to the north-eastern slopes of the mountains, and was encamped in and about Bami and Beurma. At any moment after their commissariat and transport arrangements should have been completed, they could march direct upon Geok Tepé, six or seven days' journey. The reinforcements from Merv were but three thousand men, according to the account now received.

By a curious coincidence the new chief of the Akhal Tekké bore the name of a celebrated Turcoman of the Goklan tribe, one of their very few recorded poets, who flourished in the middle of the eighteenth century. He

devoted his life and talents to the unification of his race, and died about 1771, in despair of being able to put an end to their internecine quarrels. My informant told me that there were at Geok Tepé upwards of two thousand breech-loading rifles taken from the Russians on various occasions, and this bore out similar statements which had been made to me from other independent sources, and of the truth of which I subsequently had ocular demonstration. Dourdi Bey, the Tekké messenger, said his countrymen felt bitterly that the Daghestan and Circassian horsemen in the Russian service, all Sunnite Mussulmans like themselves, had fought so fiercely against them. Some time previously, a great authority on Central Asian matters had given it as his opinion that the Russians were trying to make use of Shiia dislike to the Sunnite sect by employing the troops of the Trans-Caucasian army corps in the Akhal Tekké expedition. This was a natural error, for the inhabitants of the territory referred to, owing to their having been up to a comparatively late period under Persian jurisdiction, were to a certain extent professors of the Shiia doctrines; but the inhabitants of the Trans-Caucasus who compose the army corps of that region are, almost without exception, Armenian and Georgian Christians, with no small proportion of pure Russians from the southern European provinces. The Trans-Caucasian corps is by no means necessarily composed of natives of that district. The cavalry attached to the force which General Lazareff commanded, save one dragoon regiment and a detachment of Cossacks, was composed of Mussulman horsemen from the Caucasus, chiefly from Daghestan, which lies immediately behind and to the north-west of the Caspian port of Derbend. These horsemen were, without exception, Sunnites. They seemed, to a very large extent, to have forgotten pre-existent antipathies to the Giaours, and lived on terms of the greatest amity

with their Christian fellow-soldiers. The truth is that the Mussulmans fighting under the Russian flag care very little about Sunnism, Shiism, or any other 'ism.' Their attitude in regard to the Turcomans is very similar to that of the Mahomedan troops of British India brought face to face with their co-religionists of Afghanistan or elsewhere. Dourdi Bey said that the Tekkés had captured several Daghestan horsemen, whose lives were spared, and who were comparatively well treated. The captives, taking advantage of the laxity with which they were guarded, took the first opportunity to escape to their former ranks, to bear arms against their Sunnite brethren. 'Now,' Dourdi Bey said, 'the Tekkés, while willing, if possible, to take their co-religionists alive, are strongly disinclined to be imposed upon. As a consequence, all Daghestan and Circassian horsemen taken in the future will have one foot cut off, both as a precaution against their running away and as a security that, either on foot or on horseback, they will not again fight against their captors.' The Tekkés had another rule, of long standing—that any Russian prisoners should immediately be put to the sword in case of an attack. It was an old habit, adapted to guarantee the secure possession of slaves—whether captured or purchased—in the case of the Tekkés, of course always the former. I own that the intelligence about the measures taken to prevent people from running away rendered me mightily uneasy. Cutting off one's foot, even with all the appliances of modern surgery, is at best but a disagreeable business. Having it hacked off with a Tekké sabre must be terrific. To stand it, a stronger constitution would be required even than to resist the assaults of the *shab-gez*. Some examples of this method of disabling captives, in danger of being retaken, came under my notice early in the preceding year, when I was at Krasnavodsk. The Tekkés had made a successful

raid upon a large village, the inhabitants of which were under Russian protection. The place was sacked, and the people carried off. The marauders were closely pursued, and, finding themselves obliged to relinquish their prey, they mutilated all the prisoners whom they were forced to abandon. Their track was strewn with persons of both sexes, each with a hand or foot hacked off. I suppose it was the same feeling for co-religionists which prevented them from killing their victims outright, that was exercised towards the Russian Mussulman soldiers by the Tekkés.

The town of Askabad, distant a long day's ride from Kuchan, and the same from Geok Tepé, Dourdi Bey described as entirely deserted, the men having all gone to the scene of war, and the women and children to Merv. Corn and fodder generally were to be procured in abundance, no distress having apparently been caused by the Russian advance. A telegraph, which had been constructed no further than from Tchikislar to Chatte, had been repeatedly cut. As the posts were of iron, but little permanent damage had been done to the line. The substitution of iron for wooden supports showed wisdom on the part of the Russians. Had the latter been used they would have formed a welcome supply of fuel to the Tekkés. It would have been difficult to preserve them even from the neutral tribes, who, as a rule, are woefully in want of firewood out on the plains. As it was, the raiders could do but little more than pull down some hundreds of yards of wire, overturn a few posts, and demolish the insulators, even should this latter refinement occur to them. With the posts they could do nothing. One post was a load for a camel, the raiders were always on horseback, and possessed no tools for breaking them up. Even if firing were at hand, heat would do little to injure them. Still, the continued tearing down of considerable lengths of wire must have proved a great embarrassment.

Dourdi Bey said that he had continually taken part in the different forays, which had ranged far out into the Krasnavodsk plain. At the latter place there was, he told me, no base of supplies, and no overland communication with the Russian head-quarters. The other Turcoman tribes of the lower Atterek retained their old attitude of partial neutrality. Only two thousand men in all had been induced to serve under the Russian standard. 'Who knows,' he said, 'but that we too may one day find ourselves in the same position? We should not be the only Sunnite Mussulmans fighting under the Russian flag.' These words were truly prophetic.

That only two thousand Turcoman cavalry should at that time be found in the Russian service was rather singular, considering the high pay offered and the intimate relations necessarily existing between the Russians and the tribes camping between Chatte and the Caspian shore. The Goklans had been at best neutral since the beginning of the operations, and often hostile; but the Jaffar Bais nearer the coast had apparently so identified themselves with the invaders, that, considering their large numbers, it was surprising that a greater supply of recruits had not been forthcoming. Perhaps the reason was that the Russians had no real need of their services, but took a limited number with them to show that the entire Turcoman population was not against them.

Dourdi Bey stated that these Yamud horsemen were considerably more feared by his friends than were the Russian cavalry. Doubtless, however, this was said more with a view of praising his own race than of indicating the true state of the case. Perhaps the most curious portion of the conversation was that touching the hopes and expectations of his countrymen in regard to the impending struggle. In the preceding year, he said, their stand at

Geok Tepé had been inspirited and sustained by the hope and belief that the English troops in Afghanistan would push on to Herat, and thence to the Turcoman country, there to join hands with the Tekkés against the common enemy. That hope had well nigh died out, though the little of it that remained helped powerfully to encourage the tribes in their resistance. One thing is, I believe, pretty certain. The Afghan war exerted an influence over this Central Asian expedition, the extent of which few Europeans can imagine. For my own part, I believe it to have been the direct cause of the entire undertaking on the one hand, and of the obstinate resistance on the other. Had the Tekké Turcomans found themselves absolutely isolated in their oasis, and had there been no hope, however vague, of assistance from outside, I believe they would have come to terms long before they did. The pacification of Afghanistan, and the withdrawal of the British troops within their own limits, subsequently proved to be a death-blow to their hopes. This being the state of the case, it became rather awkward for me to present myself. I recollected that towards the close of the Russo-Turkish war, life among the Osmanlis was very disagreeable, owing to the universal cry that Turkey had been led into war, and abandoned by England at the last moment. Though the case of the Turcomans was not quite similar, I could not help thinking, and I had grounds for doing so, that they were allowed by the Government of Lord Beaconsfield to base their hopes of aid on something more substantial than their own illusions. Certainly while there still existed any possibility of coming in hostile contact with Russia over the Cabul question, no better policy could have been adopted than that of allowing the Turcomans to hope that British soldiers might march from Herat to their assistance. And I feel convinced that they were not only allowed to believe it, but

that it was directly told them. Finding themselves on the horns of a dilemma in which they must either fight alone or submit, they decided to try the former alternative, and then, if worsted, to turn round and join heartily with Russia in any movements she might subsequently make eastward.

Dourdi Bey, the substance of whose conversation I am giving, stated that his countrymen might and would have been of vast assistance to England in keeping Russian troops at a distance from Herat and other important points to which their country is the key; and that, in the hope that their services might be utilised, they repelled the brilliant offers made them by Russia. Among these, he said, was the proposition which even at the moment of his interview was still being held out, that the Tekkés should join with Russia and the Afghans in making a descent upon India and expelling the English therefrom. I had previously heard vague rumours that Russian agents were engaged in propagating such ideas among the Turcomans, but until I saw Dourdi Bey I had no opportunity of hearing these rumours confirmed by one of the parties concerned. That the Tekkés, once thoroughly made to understand how completely isolated they would be in a conflict with Russia, would probably lose heart for further resistance, and be all the more open to the seductive offers and promises lavishly made, the present situation proves. Even at the time the more westerly Tekkés said, 'How can we hope to withstand the arms of the White Czar, when even the Sultan of Stamboul himself was not able to do so?' To my own knowledge, this idea was rapidly growing among the Turcomans, and it was my opinion that unless pressed for time in presence of circumstances and projects which as yet belonged to the dominion of theory, Russia would be exceedingly unwise in precipitating matters. 'Should she

assail the Tekké stronghold now, the Turcomans will infallibly fight desperately; but should she give sufficient time, after occupying the borders of their territory, they will gradually awake to a sense of their true position and its hopelessness; and the fiery spirit of resistance which now fills all hearts will gradually, but surely, die out. A temporising policy would certainly be the best and surest one for the Russian expeditionary forces, if only the conquest of the Akhal Tekké were in view, but of course there may be other motives, of a farther-reaching ken, which imperatively demand prompt and decisive action. The disastrous defeat of Lomakin last year, with its consequent loss of prestige, has, of course, to be avenged, and I should not be surprised even if overtures of peace, with offers of submission on the part of the Turcomans, were rejected until a redeeming Russian victory be first achieved.' The preceding lines were written before the fall of Geok Tepé, and I believe that they then perfectly expressed the situation. The withdrawal from Afghanistan changed the whole course of events. The feeling in the army was very strong indeed on the subject when I was last in the Russian camp; and, in the then precarious state of the empire, military feelings and desires had to be carefully attended to. Did the Tekkés meditate a prolonged and indefinite resistance, it was hard to guess what they meant to do should their Gibraltar at Geok Tepé be captured. They had not prepared any similar position in their rear; and Merv was a long way off. I wrote to the Tekké chief asking his permission to come to him, at the same time taking the precaution to assure him that I had nothing whatever to do with politics, and stating precisely the capacity in which I wished to visit Geok Tepé. I was very explicit on this point, as a misunderstanding might lead to very disagreeable results. The nature of a newspaper was probably not

very distinctly understood by Makdum Kuli Khan and his followers; and the feeling of disappointment arising from the non-receipt of expected assistance might, in the hour of defeat, take an ugly form for a special correspondent.

Throughout all this affair Persia maintained, with regard to Russia, what may be termed a benevolent neutrality—a very benevolent one. Among the people and officials along the frontier the feeling was altogether a pro-Russian one, and they hailed with delight the probability of having the Russians ere long as neighbours instead of their former troublesome ones. This was scarcely to be wondered at; but I think that in the purely official classes the feeling in favour of Russia was not altogether to be traced to the pleasure of seeing them take the place of the Tekkés. The number of articles of Russian manufacture in the hands of border chiefs—articles of luxury of great value—showed that in frontier relations the Russians were not forgetful of those little social amenities, in the shape of presents, so conducive to a mutual good feeling. This is an invariable Russian custom under similar circumstances; and in this case seems to have attained its object. In fact, it appeared to me that the Russian officials charged with conducting frontier policy in that part of the world thoroughly understood their mission, and that in Central Asia the Russian Government had the game all in its own hands. So 'benevolent' was Persia's neutrality that, as far as she was concerned, Russia might do pretty much what she pleased along the frontier in dealing with the Tekkés, and still meet with every facility she might stand in need of in so doing.

I have already mentioned an interview which I had with the virtual Prime Minister of Persia, the Sipah Salar Aazem, during which some remarks were made about the Russo-Tekké question. I asked his Highness

whether it were intended altogether to abandon the Akhal Tekkés during the impending struggle, in view of the fact that Persia still laid claim not only to their territory but to the Merv district. 'Not exactly,' he replied. 'We shall of course always do what can be done in the matter.' That, however, seemed to be absolutely nothing. I was much inclined to believe what I had on more than one occasion heard hinted at, that in all this Akhal Tekké and Merv affair there was a secret understanding between the Russian and Persian Governments; and this understanding may possibly yet lead to more important results than the annihilation of a handful of border barbarians.

The illness to which I have already alluded had not only detained me in Kuchan, but had materially altered my plans. Before attempting the trip to Merv, I found it necessary to pay a visit to Meshed, hoping to find some needed medical assistance there, and accordingly, after a three weeks' sojourn in Kuchan, I abandoned the idea of taking the road to Askabad, and on the morning of August 10 I started for the sacred city of Persia. I was much pulled down by my fever, and as I buckled on my revolver-belt preparatory to starting, my Tekké friend, who had nursed me so well, smiled pityingly. He evidently thought I was in little trim for wielding arms of any sort, considering my worn frame and tottering gait. Still I managed to get on horseback, though I could only bear the slowest pace of the animal. The journey to Meshed, usually made by foot-passengers in two or two-and-a-half days, occupied me no less that seven. Even so I was glad to leave Kuchan, with its horrid hovels and insect plagues, and to be on the road to more promising quarters.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### KUCHAN TO MESHED.

The Meshed road—Kurdish customs—A thievish chief—Rapacious officials—Persian building—Fruits—Pitfalls in the roads—Meshed—A magnificent prospect—The Grand Boulevard of Meshed—Lack of public spirit—Russian commerce—Strange nationalities—Persian attendants—Antique coins—A Persian house—Fountains and water supply—Drinks of the country—Population of Meshed—Turcoman horses.

WEAK as I was, I endeavoured to keep a note of the road along which I was travelling, and which, though little known, is of the highest importance in relation to Russian designs in Central Asia. The natural highway to Meshed from Kuchan is excellently suited for the passage of an army; corn, wood, and water abound along its whole length. It would be the easiest matter for the Russians, now that they are masters of Geok Tepé, to cross the Akhal Tekké mountains, and advance, without resistance from the timid inhabitants, to Meshed, which has more than once already served as a base of operations against Herat. On the maps in my possession there is a strange confusion, intentionally or otherwise, of the names of places along this important road. At least the names given by the inhabitants are quite different from those printed on the maps. The first village after leaving Kuchan, and about four *farsakhs* or fourteen miles distant, is Jaffarabad. Six *farsakhs* further on comes Seyidan, and three and a half further Gunabad. Then comes Chenaram, and afterwards Kasimabad, the only large place along the whole

road, and situated close to the ruins of Toos, the former capital of Khorassan, now only a heap of earth mounds. The *farsakh* is the ancient *parassang* of classic writers, and is about three-and-a-half English miles. All the before-mentioned places are villages of the usual type.

The road to Meshed is commonly said to be very dangerous; the trouble, however, does not arise from marauders, but from the peasants along the road, who eke out their ordinary gains by turning an occasional hand to robbery. The people of the mountains are of Kurdish and Afghan descent. Their ancestors were planted here by Shah Abass and Nadir Shah as military colonists to keep guard against the Turcomans. They are a far braver and more manly race than the Persians, but on the score of honesty can claim no superiority over the Tekkés themselves. In fact, their plundering talents are developed in more numerous ways, for a Turcoman will only rob when in the saddle for a foray, while a Kurd is as ready to filch any article he can find lying unwatched as to rob on the high road. Of course they do not carry off captives like the nomads, but woe betide the unfortunate traders who venture among these mountains alone or in small bodies. They are nearly sure to be stripped or maltreated. Indeed, it is in this manner that the Kurdish villages usually procure their supplies of groceries and cloth. A dervish or a beggar will have his wants cheerfully supplied, and a penniless traveller will find the muleteers or others whom he may encounter both friendly and good-natured, but if he be suspected of having anything worth stealing he is regarded as fair game. This state of things is common in all the wilder portions of the East, from the shores of the Mediterranean to the banks of the Murgab. An anecdote will illustrate the ways of these Kurds. At my stopping-place for the night an old white-bearded chief whose rank entitled

him to the privilege, came to call on me in my tent. I gravely motioned him to a place on the edge of my carpet; he gave the salutation of peace, and joined both hands, the regular mode of expressing 'at your service.' His quick eye meantime made a rapid survey of my property. I took pains to show him the mechanism of my revolver, while my sword lay conspicuously on a leopard-skin that served me for a bed. Under the appearance of looking for something in my saddle bags I turned them inside out before him, displaying a large amount of papers, and a few shirts, but nothing that could excite Kurdish cupidity. Satisfied that there was little worth stealing he ultimately took his leave.

Harvesting was going on briskly on both sides of the road as I made my way slowly along. The grain is winnowed by tossing it on broad shovels and letting the chaff blow away, and numbers of peasants were engaged in the process. The country is literally teeming with agricultural wealth. Corn seems going to waste for want of a market; flocks and herds of hump-backed zebus cover the plain, and the long plantations of mulberry trees bespeak the extent to which silk cultivation is carried on. The regular taxation exacted by the Government is by no means heavy, yet the peasants live in abject poverty. A platter of rice *pilaff*, seasoned at times, in the richer houses, with a few boiled plums or a chicken boiled to rags, appears to be the highest luxury of these people's existence. At Jaffarabad the food to be had were only round cakes so stale as to be like stones, with ill-smelling goat's milk and worse cheese. I managed to get half a dozen eggs, which I swallowed raw, as the state of my stomach would not allow of my attempting the other viands. The only explanation of the manner in which the surplus wealth of this district is absorbed lies in the existence of a crowd of greedy and useless officials,

great and small, who live by extorting perquisites from the farmers. From the Governor of a province down to the lowest subaltern they are all alike, and gratuities are exacted in a thousand shapes, until the peasants are left bare of all but the merest necessaries. Persians who affect European culture will tell you that after a study of the social system of Europe they feel convinced that it does not differ in this respect materially from their own, and that the only difference is in the form of collection of the imposts. One must pity the people whose enlightened classes can thus conveniently dispose of such a question.

The last six days of my journey differed in no material point from the first. All the villages were similar collections of cubical mud houses, with flat domes for roofs, huddled together without any streets, like so many wasps' nests. The construction of these domes is worth mentioning. No scaffolding of any kind is used in their erection. The builder squats on the edge of the thick square walls when the latter have reached the required height and lays a circle of flat unburned brick on the top of the square, using semi-liquid clay as cement. The work is then carried up in courses of the same material, each course projecting a little inwards until at the top, when the eye of the dome is closed by wedging in some slabs as a key. The outside is then smoothly plastered with loam. As the lower courses set rapidly, the builder can rest on them as he comes to the upper part of his work, and the roofs thus built are both strong and waterproof. This system of dome building is used for buildings of greater importance and more costly materials than peasants' houses. The roof of the Persian Cossack stables at Teheran is constructed in the same fashion.

Within a day's journey of Meshed the cornfields began to be replaced by large melon and cucumber patches. In

some places the tendrils of the plants are trained on slight trellis frames, so that their broad leaves form summer-houses to protect the watchmen of the gardens from the sun. Few prettier sights had met my eye than these fresh green bowers, with their broad yellow flowers, after the dusty and parched stubble fields through which I had been passing. Orchards, too, are found at intervals, from which the markets are abundantly supplied with grapes, peaches, apricots, and plums, all of delicious flavour. The dark purple plums are often as large as good-sized peaches. The ground is cut up with irrigating ditches in every direction, both open and covered with earth. The latter (*kanots*), when old, are a source of constant danger to travellers. In making them, shafts are sunk at intervals of from thirty to forty yards, like wells, and the sand and gravel from these pits is hauled to the surface in buckets and piled around the mouth of the pit in an annular heap. During the rains these heaps are gradually washed into the channels below and swept away by the current, so that nothing is left to protect or point out the openings of the shafts, which, moreover, are annually widened by the rains, until they are sometimes ten or even fifteen feet across, with yawning edges, and going down to a sheer depth of sixty or seventy feet. These pitfalls occur often in the most frequented tracks, where thousands of men and animals are continually passing, and that, too, frequently by night, according to the already described peculiarity of Persian travellers. To make the danger greater the mouths are often completely hidden by undergrowth and by the luxuriant masses of creeping berberis, which is common here. I have often seen skeletons of camels, with parts of the skin attached, wedged eight or ten feet down in these chasms, the animals having evidently fallen in and been left to perish there. On several occasions I should have met with a similar fate but for the instinct of my horse,

whose look-out for such snares was often keener than his rider's. I have little doubt but hundreds of belated travellers must yearly find their graves in these horrible gulfs, which yawn in every direction and certainly do not add to the comfort or safety of travelling in Khorassan.

It was late on a sultry afternoon, the seventh day after my departure from Kuchan, that I came at last within sight of the Holy City of Shiia devotion. In front, was a dark wide grove of tall trees, behind which the ochre-tinted battlements and ramparts of the town peered, while high over all towered the gilt dome and minarets of the mosque of the great Imam Riza. I had long learned to look with distrust on the external appearance of Eastern towns, so little in accord with their interiors, but I could not help being struck with admiration as I caught my first glimpse of Meshed. Except Stamboul, as viewed from the Bosphorus, nothing I had seen in the East could compare with it in beauty, and I could well realise the effect it must produce on the imaginations of the pilgrims who had toiled across the long dusty roads for, it may be, months together, when the sacred city reveals its glories to their devout gaze. In the burning sun the golden dome seemed to cast out rays of dazzling light, and the roofs of the adjoining minars shone like brilliant beacons. Meshed is *par excellence* the Holy City of the Shiite Mahomedans, scarcely yielding in supposed sanctity to Mecca itself. Its position in the Shah's dominions tends to exalt its importance for Persians over Kerbella and Kufa, the two other great centres of Shiite Mahomedanism, and the resting-places respectively of Hussein and of Ali himself. The latter cities are in Turkish territory, and though venerated by both sects of Mahomedans, yet national prejudices make the majority of Shiite pilgrims select Meshed as their favourite resort.

Apart from its importance as a religious centre, Meshed

is an important military post. Its proximity to the frontier and the roads which meet at it make it a strategical point deserving of high consideration from the Shah's Government. Accordingly, the fortifications, though only of earth, are kept in good repair, and when I visited it a force of about a thousand men was encamped outside its walls as a protection against the Turcomans. The ramparts are flanked with towers at intervals of every fifty yards, and an interior gallery is constructed in the thickness of the wall near the base, from which a second line of fire could be poured into an assailing force. A second and lower line of defence, a *fausse-braye* in military terms, seems to have formerly existed beyond and around the present fortifications, but it is now completely ruined. The country around is wild and uncultivated, and offers little cover, and altogether the place is quite strong enough to resist any attack the nomads might make, though a regular European battering train could reduce it in a few hours. By some strange oversight on the part of the military engineers who constructed these fortifications, no provision has been made for enfilading the ditches, and thus an enemy who once effected a lodgment under the curtain wall would be perfectly safe from the fire of the garrison.

Entering by the western gate I found myself in a broad thoroughfare, down the centre of which flowed a canal, with kerbing of brick flush with the roadway. The canal was eight or nine feet wide and about five deep, but had only a few inches of filthy water at the bottom. In fact, it serves as an open sewer to convey the refuse water from the various dyeing establishments along its banks, and at times is entirely dry, when the water is drawn off for irrigation outside. A noble row of old plane-trees with large mulberry trees intermixed runs along one bank, and in places spring from the bed itself, nearly choking up the channel.

Occasionally the mulberries grow horizontally across the channel, forming natural bridges, and in other places planks and brick arches give passage from side to side. The street itself is about two hundred feet wide, lined on both sides with shops, those on the right of the stream being chiefly devoted to the sale of vegetables and fruit. Here were huge piles of cucumbers, water melons, vegetable marrows and potatoes, the last especially good. There was also a superabundance of peaches, plums, and grapes, the last, of the long muscatel variety, and excellent. With its magnificent trees and water supply, which could easily be kept unpolluted, it would not be difficult to convert this street into a boulevard of surpassing grandeur, with a picturesque gate-tower like those of Teheran at one end, and the splendid Mosque of Imam Riza at the other. Except this and a few other bazaar streets, the town is a mere accumulation of mud huts piled together in such disorder that a stranger wonders how many of the inhabitants can get into their abodes. These house-masses are traversed by narrow galleries covered with a rude thatch of reeds and earth clots, and often with no other light than that which enters at the ends. No doors nor windows open on these dismal alleys, which are cumbered with rubbish heaps and cut up with ruts in every direction, while litters of puppies lie around on all sides and are constantly getting under the feet of the wayfarer as he stumbles along in the dim light. At times the rubbish heaps rise so high as to bring his head into sudden contact with the roof above, with the result of bringing down showers of clay and dust. One could almost touch both sides of some of these passages at the same time by extending his arms. From these covered alleys one emerges into narrow open lanes running between blank walls relieved occasionally by a small wooden door, and sometimes opening into irregular spaces

of waste ground filled with heaps of *débris* and offal of all kinds. Though extremely particular about the interior of their houses, with their white walls, fountains, tanks, and carpets, the Persians are utterly indifferent to the condition of their streets, or to the vile smells occasioned by the wanton deposit of filth in them. They will leave their shoes or slippers at the house door, to avoid soiling the carpets, but they never dream of removing a dung-heap from before their very doors. The same spirit indeed pervades the whole national character. Private individual interests are closely attended to; but whatever requires public combination for the common good is invariably left unattempted. The Persian is contented to wait for some energetic Shah or Vizier to arise, who may, like Abass the Great or Nadir, be of a constructive turn of mind, to erect his caravanserais, dig his canals, and build his roads. For the community or private individuals to attempt such works is a thing unheard of.

The activity displayed in the streets of the bazaar is in striking contrast to the stillness which marks the other portions of the city. In those narrow lanes you seldom meet a living thing except dogs or cats, while the bazaar is thronged with a busy and motley throng. Russia completely controls the trade in European goods, except perhaps in sugar, a little of which comes from Marseilles. Cloths, linen and cotton goods, porcelain, glass, trays, lamps, and other European manufactured articles are all Russian. Tea comes from Astrakan to Teheran or Asterabad, and thence to Meshed. It is, however, in the people that throng it that this bazaar of Meshed differs most from that of the other Persian towns I have seen. Hadjis and merchants from all the neighbouring countries elbow the native Persians, and each nationality is easily distinguished. The Persian merchant is generally a clean well-dressed man

with white silk turban, flowing robes, and long beard, unlike the officials, who generally affect European dress. This tall slight man, with delicately cut features, large dark eyes, and stately pace, is an Arab merchant from Baghdad. These two odd-looking little old men, with mouse-coloured faces, and red mark between the eyes, clad in dark monkish-looking gowns and sandals, are traders from Bombay, and, for the moment, the guests of Abass Khan, the native British agent here. They halt and salute me elaborately as I pass. Half a dozen Merv Turcomans, with calm, resolute air, and keeping well together, come next, with their usual sauntering step and upright carriage. They look as if they were taking stock of the goods displayed around them, and were meditating how best to effect a wholesale sweep of them. A little further on we meet some half-dozen jaunty-looking, handsome young men in dark tunics and sombre-tinted turbans, one end of the cloth stuck up cockade-wise in front, the other hanging upon the neck. One of them carries a small circular shield of iron, embossed, inlaid, engraved, and ornamented as the shield of Achilles. Held by the scabbard, and thrown carelessly over his shoulder, is an exceedingly curved Indian-looking sword, with wonderfully small, bulbous iron handle. He is an Afghan chief, accompanied by his friends. I am not acquainted with them, but they bow and smile pleasantly as they recognise my nationality. I remarked the same thing of all the Afghans here, and the town was full of them, both traders and refugees. They all invariably smiled and saluted me. At Kuchan it was the same thing. I have met many of them, from Cabul, Candahar, Jellalabad, and Herat. Some of them had taken an active part in the late war, but none seemed to bear the slightest ill-will towards Englishmen on that account. With me they were most friendly. Many, in view of the occupation of their

native country, spoke of themselves as already British subjects. This surprised me all the more that it was so completely at variance with what I heard every day about Afghan fierceness of temper, and the wild love of independence which characterises them.

The throng of passers-by give way to right and left, and a man appears, dressed in a garment half frock-coat, half-tunic, of light, snuff-coloured material. He wears black trousers of European cut, rather short, and shoes which allow of a view of his white stockings. On his head is the usual Persian black lambswool tiara. He keeps one hand upon the other, in front of him, as if he were handcuffed, and during his very slow walk sways his shoulders to and fro. Immediately behind him is a man bearing a large silver water-pipe; around him is a small crowd of persons somewhat similarly attired, and walking as nearly as possible like him. These are a Persian official and his attendants. He keeps his eyes on the ground, lifting them but occasionally, and affects an air of profound thought and pre-occupation, while probably he has not two ideas in his head. He is perhaps going to pay a visit to the Governor or some other high official. On such occasions the entire household turn out in their best array, and the silver water-pipe is as indispensable as the mace at a municipal state ceremony. In Persia, no one with any pretence to respectability would dream of stirring outside the door without at least four men walking behind him. My appearance with a solitary attendant—a factotum who looked after myself and my horses, and acted as cook into the bargain—created quite a scandal. The British agent was so terrified at the possible loss of national prestige that might accrue therefrom that he actually forced on me one of the soldiers who mounted guard at his residence. At Teheran these absurd notions are beginning to die out, in consequence of the intro-

duction of Western ideas. An ordinary individual may, without loss of self-respect, walk unaccompanied down the principal streets. It is only on occasions of ceremony that a display of attendants is called for. The old-fashioned Persians, however, adhere still to their national customs, especially in the remote districts like Meshed.

The variety of coins current in this place would delight the heart of a numismatist. Besides the concourse of pilgrims who bring specimens of every Asiatic mint with them, 'finds' of old coins are frequently made in the ruins with which the whole country is filled, and contribute to the variety of the currency. Ancient Greek and Persian coins can be had here for little more than their bullion value, in abundance. I have little doubt but that rare and valuable coins might be found in the Meshed bazaar by a skilled numismatist. A friend of mine long resident in Persia told me that a gold coin of the time of Alexander might be found here, for a specimen of which twelve hundred pounds has been paid in Europe. It is about the size of half a crown, but only an expert could venture to purchase a specimen, as it has been imitated closely by the Jewish dealers of Baghdad. The great advantage one would have in buying coins in such a place as Meshed is that there are no forgeries of rare pieces attempted there for want of a market, so one is pretty sure that an apparently old piece is really such. The natives care nothing for old coins, though they readily buy antique jewellery, and, in consequence, there is an immense quantity of spurious relics, in the shape of cameos and intaglios especially hawked about the bazaar, but coins are hardly saleable for more than their bullion value, and so are not imitated. I bought for two krans a Greek coin of the Bactrian kingdom, I think, as large as a shilling, with a well-executed head of Hermes on one side and a full-length figure of Hercules with his club, and a Greek inscription, on

the obverse. Another curious thing I noticed here was the presence of fragments of stone cornices and other mouldings, evidently of Western workmanship. They are used in all kinds of ways; as stepping-stones, for instance, or water troughs, but there is no mistaking their form.

As I intended passing some time in Meshed, both for the sake of health and as affording me a point of vantage to obtain news from the Turcomans, I rented a house temporarily. It was a typical Persian abode. The entrance-door was set far back in a high mud wall, the recess having seats on each side, perhaps to let callers rest during the long interval between their knocks and the opening of the door. A long passage led from the door to a paved court-yard about forty feet square, planted with a few flowers and shrubs. The side opposite the entrance was occupied by the kitchen, and a large room adjoining, with five windows looking into the court. In this I took up my lodgings. It had, besides the windows on the court, doors on either side, communicating respectively with the kitchen, and with stairs on the other side. The room itself was about twenty feet wide and thirty in length, divided in the middle by two massive pillars, and the inner portion raised a few inches above the outer floor. There were deep recesses in the wall, serving as cupboards or closets. The whole interior was whitewashed. The outer part of the room between the pillars and the windows was nearly filled by a water tank with the kerb raised a few inches above the floor, and a stone pipe in the centre, from which a jet of water was occasionally played to cool the air. The tank was nearly five feet deep, and on several occasions I narrowly escaped an involuntary bath as I entered my room in moments of abstraction. The water supply of Meshed is very bad, and reeks with sulphuretted hydrogen, so that the presence of this tank in my bedroom was by

no means an unmixed pleasure. Sometimes, indeed, when the water played at night from the jet and disturbed the lower depths of the pool, the stench was so unbearable that I used to have my bed carried out into the garden. Living fish were occasionally thrown in by the stream from the stone pipe, and they invariably died in a few hours, owing to the poisonous nature of the water. Besides the gases, which might readily be accounted for by the numerous cesspools through which the water supply passes in the town itself, the water seemed to be charged with mineral matters whose nature I could not determine. When I first arrived I wished to take a dose of Epsom salts, but on pouring the dose into half a tumbler of water it was almost instantly converted into a dirty white slag-mass like half-melted glass. The water had a thick and oily taste, and under ordinary circumstances would be quite undrinkable. This was all the more annoying, as hardly any other drink could be had in the place. The natives used at their meals a liquor called *doug*, coagulated milk diluted with water, but this, though agreeable enough, was too trying for an invalid's stomach. The wine was abominable, in spite of the excellent quality of the grapes. It tasted like stale beer mixed with spirits, and was of a dirty brown colour. The only other beverage was a syrup called *sikanjebin*, made of sugar and vinegar boiled together, which was drunk mixed with water.

Meshed is one of the chief cities of Persia. The circuit of its walls is about four miles, and the population, exclusive of pilgrims, is estimated at fifty thousand. There is a good deal of trade, but hardly so much as might be expected considering the stir in the streets. Coppersmiths abound in one quarter of the bazaar, and deafen the passengers with their hammers as they make their pots and kettles. There are several brick-yards outside the

city, in which the flat bricks used for the better class of works are burned, dry brush and grass being used for fuel. These are the only available materials, wood being too valuable to be applied to such uses. The poorer classes use dried dung exclusively, for firing, and at the house where I stopped I remarked that the stable manure was carefully carried out every morning and spread on the roofs to dry in the sun. It was afterwards packed in bags and stored away for the winter. The horses are generally of the Persian breed, being a mixture of Arab and Turcoman blood, but thoroughbred Turcomans are also frequently exposed for sale. I saw two fine ones offered for sale in the bazaar on the day of my arrival. They were very richly caparisoned. Besides embroidered saddle cloths and housings, they had heavy silver collars studded with turquoises and cornelians, and corresponding ornaments on every available part of the body. The value of the trappings must have equalled that of the steeds themselves.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE SHRINE OF IMAM RIZA.

A Persian Mecca—Jealousy of Christian visitors—Interments in the sacred ground—Tombstone makers—A Persian lathe—The great mosque—Characteristic architecture—Colour in architecture—The tomb of Haroun-al-Raschid — Renegade Christians—Light and shade effects — Wealth of a Mahomedan sanctuary—Rights of pilgrims—Mosques in decay—Minars and Irish round towers—An ancient rite—Saluting the sunset—Barbaric music—Relics of Zoroastrism—Sunnites and Shiites—The twelve holy Imams—Wine drinking among Persians—National traditions and religion—The Mahomedan conqueror of Persia.

THE only thing worth seeing at Meshed is the great mosque of Imam Riza; and that, unfortunately, is the most difficult thing to see, both on account of its position and the jealous care with which Shiia bigotry wards off the approach of the infidel to the sacred precincts. It is only from the eastern or western extremities of the great central avenue of the city that a glimpse can be caught of the golden dome and minars. On a nearer approach, the trees, houses, and massive gateways which give access to the great courtyard in which the building stands, completely shut out the view. As you approach along the avenue from either side, following the course of the central stream, you are suddenly stopped by a wall reaching across the entire street. It has two large gates and as many window-like apertures closed by stout wooden bars. It is about two hundred yards from the great gateway, and immediately within it and reaching up to the latter is a very animated portion of the bazaar, to which, however, access is forbidden

to *giaours*. This outer gateway is a favourite place of resort for itinerant barbers, who are to be seen there by dozens, plying their razors on the crowns of their customers. Here, too, we find those dealers altogether peculiar to the East, who go about with a tray full of pipes before them, and who let you have a smoke from a *chibouk* or a *kalioun*, as you may fancy, for the sum of about half a farthing. The stream of people passing in and out of this interior bazaar, hadjis and merchants, is continuous; and in a moment the stranger is surrounded by a crowd gazing and staring as if his like had never before been seen. The entire structure is covered with enamelled tiles, blue and yellow arabesques on a white ground. At a distance the effect is very fine indeed. Above the arch of the western gate is a clock. I was very anxious to get a close look at the great mosque, and I was at my wits' end how to do so, when a soldier, kindly lent me from his guard by the British agent, bethought himself of a doorway, not unpleasantly railed off like the two greater ones, and from which the desired sight might be obtained. Crossing a steep bridge over the muddy stream, which, by the way, flows right through the holy ground to afford the faithful an opportunity of performing their ablutions, we plunged into a labyrinth of narrow streets to the left. We traversed a series of tunnels, such as I have already described, and emerged into a vast open space. This was the 'field of the dead,' the place where those whose bodies are brought from far for deposition near the shrine of Imam Riza are interred. It was of great extent, and literally paved with tombstones—horizontal flags, for the Persians, unlike the Turks, do not use vertical head-stones. I counted about a dozen vertical monuments. These probably marked the resting-places of Sunnites—for such, heretics as they are considered here, are not excluded from the holy precincts.

It was literally 'a wilderness of graves and tombs.' For centuries the dead had been packed into this space, until you could not put your hand between the monumental flags, and yet, the cry is 'still they come.' There were asses standing by, waiting to have their ghastly loads unpacked—poor remnants of humanity whose former owners had given perhaps half the hard-earned gatherings of a life to buy rest nearer to the golden dome, sheltered from the iron hammers of Monkir and Nankir. It is no joke, on a hot autumn day, to run the gauntlet of a row of the remains of pious people who have been dead mayhap for the past three months. There was one row of coffins sweltering in the noontide blaze, whence an amber-coloured liquor was distilling through the felt wrapping and forming little pools in the dust, a row whence 'rose the rich steams of sweet mortality.' I shot past with an irreverent haste which I am afraid scandalised the true believers. On dead walls not far off some traders in religion had fixed up large canvas paintings, fifteen feet square, representing various scenes in the massacre of Hassan and Hussein, and some combats of Rustam with the White Demon, that everlasting subject of Persian art. Whenever a crowd collected, and many of them were women, some of whom descended from their red horse litters, the two exhibitors commenced a kind of recitative chant, descriptive of the event represented in their painting, occasionally bursting forth into song of a very monotonous character. Around, old moullahs were seated among the tombs, reading the Koran in a loud voice with a view of extracting charity from the hadjis; and deformed beggars almost in a state of nudity whined and howled at the passers-by. How all these people managed to support the odour of the reeking corpses close by I cannot imagine. I was glad to get away from the spot, and followed my guide into a covered passage leading

towards the great mosque. It was lined with booths of stone-cutters, who sold tombstones; and vendors of those little cakes of clay stamped with Koranic inscriptions, which Persians place on the ground before them when praying, and touch with their foreheads when they prostrate themselves. These clay cakes, which must be earth from some one of the holy places, such as Kufa, Kerbella, Meshed, &c., the Sunnite Mussulmans altogether dispense with. They are of a light chocolate colour, and vary in size and shape. Some are octagonal, and only an inch and a half in diameter. Others are as big as and the shape of a piece of Windsor soap. The tombstone merchants are hard at work chipping away at their rude slabs to supply the never-failing demand. Their booths are half full of chips and dust; and they sit upon a pile of the same material, the skirts of which reach into the middle of the narrow passage. To judge from its dimensions it must have been accumulating since the days of their grandfathers; and the present workers are now being gradually raised towards the roofs of their stalls on the summits of these ever-growing heaps, which no one dreams of removing. Mingled with the sepulchral ornament makers are people who manufacture cooking pots from a hard light blue gritty limestone; the most singular material perhaps from which a cooking pot was ever made. They are about ten inches wide at the mouth, and about thirteen at the bottom. The stone is first rudely shaped interiorly by scoring it from rim to bottom with chisels. While still solid the mass of stone is placed in a rude lathe. It is only an iron axle on which is a wooden bobbin. The string of a curved bow is passed a couple of times round this, and the worker, by drawing the bow backwards and forwards, causes the stone to rotate alternately in opposite directions. A curved steel instrument gradually smooths the outside of the stone and

gives it a circular outline. It is afterwards laboriously hollowed out with hammer and chisel. The cost of such a pot is tenpence, though it occupied the artificer two days to make it. Passing by these stone-workers we arrive at a short passage forming an oblique angle with the last. Here there are merchants selling cloth and miscellaneous articles. At the end of the passage is a tall wide gateway, and then a full view of the front of the great mosque bursts upon the sight. I pressed close to the gates, despite the rude cries of *booroo* (get away) addressed to me on all sides as a *giaour* is seen approaching the sacred threshold, though the front of the mosque is nigh a hundred yards away. I verily believe that but for my military attendant I should have been bodily maltreated for my presumption in approaching, even at such a respectful distance, the holy of holies of Shiiadom. It was early in the forenoon, and the full blaze of the sun fell upon the great front, with its glittering blue and white surface and gilt minar and gateway. Just as there are certain seasons at which to visit different countries, if we would see their peculiarities and characteristics fully developed, so there are certain hours of the day, and certain degrees and directions of light, at which certain buildings look their best, and the idea of the architect is brought saliently before the eye. The great front at which I gazed is simply a massive block of building rising high above the main body of the edifice behind like the front of a Gothic cathedral. It resembles the latter in nothing else, being entirely plain except for the great recessed portal which occupies a great part of its front. In fact it resembles the pylon of an Egyptian temple, but without the incline inwards characteristic of the latter. The effect, when seen from the front, is massive and imposing, but when viewed from either side it has a makeshift and patchwork air that takes greatly from the appearance of the whole. On

the right of this façade, and in a line with it, is a massive square tower rising slightly above the latter, and terminating in a cylindrical minaret, which projects like a bartizan beyond the wall of the tower. This minaret has on its summit a cage-like chamber for the *muezzim*, which is again surmounted by a tall pinnacle. The minaret, from the point where it springs from the tower, is covered with copper plates richly gilt. The entire tower and façade are covered with tiles a foot square, and so neatly joined that the surface seems one unbroken sheet of blue and white enamel slightly relieved with orange. The gateway is of the usual ogive form, and deeply recessed like that of a Gothic cathedral. The peculiar Persian ornamentation within the arch, and which seems copied from the inside of the rind of a pomegranate when the seeds are removed, or a broken section of a honeycomb, is richly gilt and coloured. Throughout Persia, both in ancient and modern buildings, this very peculiar style of arch ornamentation is to be found, replacing the continuous mouldings of Gothic architecture. It is as if a number of short hexagonal prisms had been pressed into soft plaster to half their depth, leaving a series of vertical three-sided cavities all connecting with each other, a slight stalactite-like appendage being added to the bottom of each group of cavities. I have seen some fine specimens of this kind of stone work in the old palace and mosques at Baku, and in the ancient Persian buildings at Kars and Erzeroum. Close to the main building, which is very plain, having nothing whatever to recommend it from an architectural point of view, and supported on a cylindrical base some thirty feet high, is a hemispherical dome all ablaze with gilding. In the rear of the building is a second façade and minaret, similar to the front. In the courtyard behind is a fountain, not as in the sense generally understood, from which *jets-d'eau* are thrown

into the air, but a kiosk-like structure similar to those to be met with in Constantinople. In keeping with the mosque, it is entirely covered with enamelled tiles, and is exceedingly pretty both in colouring and outline. As I gazed at the glittering front before me, over a thousand pilgrims, all of whom had donned the white hadji turban, were prostrating themselves in the great courtyard before the entrance-gate, preparatory to entering the shrine itself. The most profound stillness reigned. Never have I seen so many persons assembled together with so little noise. In that vast crowd were mingled together Sunnite and Shiite, their religious differences merged for the moment before the shrine of Imam Riza. While each of these pilgrims was doubtless swelling with satisfaction and a consciousness of arduous duty performed, and half forgot his long and arduous toil along the dreary hills and plains that separated him from his home, I, too, felt that I had performed a pilgrimage, and that I was at least a literary hadji. Few, if any, of those hundreds who bowed before the golden portals recollected aught but the memory of the Imam whose tomb gives sanctity to the pile. As for me, I could gaze with scarce aught but interest upon a temple beneath whose golden cupola rests one the story of whose adventures and eccentricities has filled many a boyish hour with delight, the contemporary of Charlemagne, the great monarch of the East, the hero of the 'Arabian Nights,' the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid. Yes, here he rests amid a crowd of forgotten sovereigns—himself forgotten in the land he ruled over, remembered only by the passing Western stranger. I should have much wished to visit his tomb within the mosque; but of that there was but little chance without a formal embracing of Islam. *A propos* of conversions to Islam, since my arrival in these parts two Europeans had been received into the

bosom of Mahomedanism. One, a young man named Dufour, I have referred to in my description of Kuchan. The other quasi-convert called upon me at Meshed. He was a Russian, a native of Tiflis, who came to Meshed a month before as an itinerant jeweller with a hadji caravan. One night his Persian servant disappeared, taking with him his stock of jewels and all his clothes. Reduced to misery, he embraced Mahomedanism for the sake of the food distributed in charity to true believers at the mosque. He saw me in the bazaar, and, thinking I was going to Teheran, came to beg me to take him with me. He vowed and swore he was no more of a Mussulman than I was, and that nothing but dire distress had induced him to go through the form of apostasy. In proof of this he crossed himself all over with astonishing rapidity in the Russian fashion, and went through a variety of genuflexions. He said he had wished to come to see me long before, but that his new co-religionists had kept dinning into his ears the penalties of falling away from his new faith, such as having his throat cut, or both his feet chopped off; and he was afraid his visit to me might be taken as a sign of coming apostasy. He was little more than twenty-two or three years of age. I comforted the fellow as well as I could, and promised to see what I could do with the Russian native agent there towards getting him sent on to Teheran. Here are cases for the Teheran missionaries to look after, instead of trying to convert Armenian Christians to their own particular doctrinal views.

I stood gazing so long at the front of the great Mussulman shrine, that the sunlight gradually faded away, leaving it and the gilt minars in cold shadow. The change was magical. It was as when the limelight dies away from the figures of some theatrical fairy scene. All in a moment is dull and commonplace. The glittering pile degenerated

into a cold pagoda-like structure surmounted by a great brass tin can. Never was pantomime transformation scene more rapid in its changes than this from gem-like beauty to a chill, rigid crockery-ware appearance. The change is all the more striking that the building has no intrinsic beauty of outline of its own. When the glory of sunlight has faded off there remains a cold, rigid, angular mass, without a line or curve which could appeal to one's æsthetic feelings. Strip off the barbaric surface gloss and glitter, and there abides not a ghost of beauty to haunt the shapeless uncouth mass which remains. I have seen many ruins of what were more or less similar structures in their days of glory. There was not a line, not a grouping that would recommend itself to the eye of an artist. Even moonlight fails to lend to the shapeless masses the charm and indulgence which 'broken arch and ruined column' seem to claim as a right. Here, there is no ruined Parthenon or temple of Jupiter to adorn the night. The surface colouring and glitter gone, a Persian ruin is a very ghoul of ugliness beside the graceful relics of other climes. Of course I am alluding entirely to Mahomedan architecture. Persepolis and similar ruins do not come within the scope of my observations. The mosque of Imam Riza, apart from its sanctity as a shrine, is a religious centre of no small importance, owing to its vast endowments, the gifts of many successive sovereigns. Almost the entire of this north-eastern corner of Persia belongs to it, and the revenue derived therefrom is enormous; indeed it must necessarily be so to support the army of moullahs, ferashes, and other functionaries deemed requisite for the due honouring of the shrine. There are over five hundred moullahs or priests, among whom are several of very high class. The ferashes or servants and guardians are proportionately numerous; and there is, besides, the usual crowd of hangers-on who

subsist upon the revenues and whose position cannot well be defined. The entire number attached to the shrine is estimated at two thousand. At night, twenty moullahs, a like number of ferashes, and as many soldiers, keep watch and ward within the building, and look after the safety of the shrine, which is, I am informed, extremely rich, and adorned with a large amount of gold and precious stones. Apart from the expenses of the vast permanent staff of retainers, there are others which must be very considerable. All pilgrims to the shrine are entitled to receive *pilaff* twice a day during the seven days following their arrival. As the influx of pilgrims is continuous and enormous, the cost of feeding them must be no small item in the daily expenses. There are, besides, whole crowds of dervishes and faquirs or poor people who are permanently on the establishment; so that considering everything—especially, too, the amount which, *more Persico*, inevitably finds its way into the pockets of everyone concerned in the adminstration—the revenues of the mosque must equal those of a small kingdom.

Besides the mosque of Imam Riza there are several others, but notably two ancient ones. Both were once highly ornamented with enamelled tiles; but they are now sadly neglected and falling to ruin. The dome of Gowher Shah's mosque has something of a bulbous shape, and is built of blue bricks beautifully glazed. Gaps have opened in its sides, and brambles grow in the crevices. There is one evidently very ancient mosque, whose name I have not been able to make out, which, as it stands, is a good specimen of Persian mismanagement and neglect. The front was once elaborately ornamented with coloured tiles, which either from earthquake shocks or the effect of the weather had in places fallen away, exposing the white plaster in which they had been imbedded, and giving the building a patched appearance. To replace the tiles would have been the

easier and more expeditious course to pursue. Instead of this, the entire front of the building was plastered over with a fine coat of yellow mud, a narrow stripe only of tiles along the entablature being left uncovered. This coat of mud is now hanging in great sheets from the front of the mosque like paper on a damp wall, showing both tiles and plaster, and presenting a thoroughly ragged appearance. The fallen tiles, exquisitely enamelled, and over four hundred, perhaps six hundred, years old, lie rudely stacked around the yard of the mosque, or thrown loosely about. There are art treasures lying there which would make a collector of *cashi* run wild with delight. As I was standing near the gate admiring these fallen treasures, a number of sallow, long-haired dervishes with battle-axes and iron-bound clubs, and who seemed to constitute themselves a guard over the premises, approached me in a menacing fashion, and I withdrew hurriedly. Close alongside this mosque is a minar of very rich appearance, built entirely of enamelled bricks, some placed obliquely with the others so as to form ornamental designs. This tower is completely detached from the main building, is perfectly plain in outline, and tapers slightly towards the summit. It is from seventy to eighty feet in height, and, in its form and isolation from the mosque itself, forcibly reminded me of the Irish round towers. In fact, take away the colour, it was similar to the old tower of Kildare. The difference between these Persian minars here, and the minarets one sees at Constantinople, is enormous. The Persian minar owes all to colour or gilding; the Turkish minaret appeals to the eye by beauty of form alone. One is the mere painter's lay-figure on which to hang rich vestments; the other is the pale Grecian statue in all its colourless beauty. The one can never cease to be beautiful even in decay; the other, with the least degeneration from its often tawdry

splendour, becomes hideous. I stayed so long lingering in the neighbourhood of the different mosques, studying their lines and colours, that the sun was already sinking towards the horizon as I turned homewards. A horrid din filled the city. From the summit of the western gateway of the great mosque men were beating gongs and blowing long blasts on most untuneful instruments which sounded like huge cow-horns. The crash and din was not without a tinge of barbaric grandeur, mingled, I thought, with a wild sadness. From different parts of the town came equally savage harmonies, that sent the wild birds whirling and shrieking in troops above our heads. The bugling from the top of the gateway was characteristic of far-off Eastern climes, 'the mournful sound of the barbarous horn.' Amid all this crash and moaning the sun sank behind the horizon; and, as I gazed, it seemed as if I were carried back to old Assyrian days and listened to the pomp and din of some long-robed procession hailing the departing luminary. Though the religion of Zoroaster be no more, I have no doubt that this fanfare saluting the setting sun is a custom come down from past ages; one of those ceremonies which still cling lovingly to an ancient shrine, though the significance of the rite be forgotten, the altars cold, the creed scarce remembered in the land.

A word or two on the religious differences between the Sunnites and Shiites may not be out of place here. As already stated, both sects worship together at the mosque of Imam Riza as they do at Mecca, still the feeling between them is very bitter. For the Sunnites, the Sultan of Turkey is not only sovereign in his own dominions, but he is Commander of the Faithful in other lands in virtue of his succession to the Caliphate. The Shiites recognise no actual caliph or visible head of their religion. They hold that only Ali and his twelve successors were entitled to

that rank, except the two immediate successors of Mahomed, and that all the rest have been only usurpers, like Omar. The Shah has no pretensions to spiritual authority as the Sultan has. Moreover, the Sunnite doctors recognise certain traditions of Islam as forming a part of the Mahomedan doctrine; while the Shiites reject them, and maintain that the Koran alone is the rule of faith and religious practice. There are a couple of minor differences in the external form of prayer also. In the preliminary washing, the Shiite is careful to let the water run off the tips of his fingers and from his elbows, as well as from the point of his beard. The Sunnite washes himself in any fashion, being only careful that the process is effective. Of the two, his is the more genuine washing, especially in the matter of the feet. When no water is to be had, as in the desert, the worshipper merely lays his palms flat on the earth or sand, and with the little which adheres goes through the form of washing, the Shiite carefully preserving his special form. During prayer, the Shiite when standing keeps his hands hanging at his sides, and when kneeling keeps them upon his knees. The Sunnite keeps them crossed before him, one upon the other. Then, again, the Shiite must have his cake of clay; while the Sunnite does not necessarily require any such *souvenir* of the holy places. I have frequently seen the Osmanli Turks and the Turcomans place on the ground before them the beads they perpetually keep passing between their fingers. Such are the main differences, doctrinal and otherwise, which separate the two great sects. Each has within itself its own minor differences, which I am not sufficiently acquainted with to give an account of. The Sunnites have notably their Puritans—the Wahabbees, a sect very numerous in central Arabia. They are, however, but a very strict sect of Sunnites. They consider the wearing of gold or silk on the person as unlaw-

ful; denounce smoking; and some go so far even as to consider coffee as among the stimulants forbidden by the Prophet. It is curious enough that while the Persian Shiites pretend that their speciality is a rigid adherence to the actual doctrines of the Koran, they should in some respects violate them most flagrantly. In their mosaic and tile decorations they make free use of the human figure and that of various animals, even on their mosques. This I do not remember ever to have seen an example of among the Sunnites, who carefully confine their architectural ornaments to arabesques or representations of flowers or other inanimate objects. Again, drinking wine and other alcoholic liquors is largely practised among the Persians. The Osmanlis, too, especially the Pasha class, and such as have studied in Europe, occasionally indulge, but to nothing like the extent to which the Persians do. The latter, once they commence, seem to know no limit to their indulgence. The Persian's *beau idéal* of a drinker is one who sits in a shady grove beside a running stream, and drinks wine until he loses consciousness; then sleeps till his senses return, and then directly recommences. Yet even those most addicted to wine-bibbing are careful never to make the least allusion to such a thing. They consider themselves justified in the indulgence, not in mentioning it. Hafiz and other Persian poets bristle with allusions to wine-cups; and, to judge from their writings, drinking wine seems to have been for a very long time past one of the principal occupations of Persians.

As I turned my steps homewards, in passing one of the numerous guard-houses which occur at short intervals throughout the town, I heard one of the soldiers venting his vexation about something by cursing Omar, the third caliph in succession to Mahomed, and the immediate predecessor of Ali. The outrageous dislike of the Persians to

this potentate is very remarkable when contrasted with the profound admiration and respect entertained for him by the Sunnites, who style him the 'Sword of God.' It was by Omar's generals that Persia was brought under the Mahomedan sway, and perhaps that fact has more to do with the Persian hatred of his name than pure theological differences. For whatever reason, the sovereign who made Persia Mahomedan is now the object of the most bitter religious hatred in that country—a strange phenomenon.

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